

THE CHILD OF THE BALL.

Book 1.

ON THE SUMMIT OF THE SIERRA.

CHAPTER I.

SYMPHONY.

BETWEEN the ancient city, the chief town of the diocese in which the famous events related in "The Three-Cornered Hat" occurred, and the renowned capital of that conservative province, where are still to be found many Moors wearing the garb of Christians, rises, forming a dividing wall between their respective horizons, a formidable spur of the loftiest and most picturesque mountain range in all Spain.

This gigantic spur of the great cordillera has, at its base, a width of nearly thirty miles—the thirty miles that separate the capital from the town—while its average elevation above the level of the sea may be six or seven thousand feet. To ascend to this height by steep acclivities, and descend by declivities no less steep, is the task of all who come and go between the two districts—a journey which could be made at the time our story opens only by

a bad bridle-path, converted a little later into a much worse cart road.

Now, then, dear reader, the first scene of the romantic and strictly historical, although not political, rustic drama which I, as an eyewitness, am about to relate to you exactly as it occurred between the suppression of the friars and the creation of the civil guard, between Larra's suicide and Espronceda's death, between the *Abrazo de Vergara* and the Pronunciamento of General Espartero—in 1840, in short—took place on the summit of this mountain, in the middle of this road, the transit from the one to the other horizon; a critical and neutral point, fifteen miles distant from the town and fifteen miles distant from the capital, and where, finally, the wayfarers who left either place at daybreak usually met, and exchanged the salutation, "God be with you, gentlemen!"

The spot is wild, rugged, and stony, without history, name, or owner, guarded by formidable giant slate-rocks, where Nature, virgin and rude as when she issued from the Creator's hands, lives simply and, consequently, with few cares, pursuing the peaceful routine of her unvarying occupations. So arid and rocky is this region that it has never occurred to anyone to wish to dispute with the wild animals the peaceful and immemorial possession of the scanty herbage or the savage thickets which clothe these precipitous crags, so that not even at the present day, when there is nothing created that has not been disentailed and sold, does the name of

this remote corner of the planet appear in the government tax-list.

And yet the rude and free inhabitants of this majestic solitude did not live altogether at their ease, at the period of which we speak; for, in addition to the usual annoyances which at certain hours the presence of man has always occasioned them, it too often happened at that time that robbers, singly or in bands, armed with formidable blunderbusses, lay in wait here for inoffensive travelers, and even for the magistrates of the state, as being a very suitable spot, strategically, to deliver battle to the laws governing society.

It was about one o'clock on the day we speak of, Saturday, April 5, and not a living soul had yet appeared in these awful solitudes shut in from view by the undulating line of the lesser mountain-chain. The birds, therefore, the wild animals, the reptiles, and the insects which inhabit them were alone and happy; doubly gay and sportive just now, because the beautiful and gracious Spring had deigned to ascend these lofty heights to spend some days in their company.

Yes, the prodigal goddess was here, and the magical influence of her grace and her beauty was everywhere visible. Flowers bloomed on all sides—in the sunny spots and in the shady spots, in the fissures of the rocks and among the lichens that clothed them, even in the winding path frequented by man, and consequently in the crosses and stones commemorative of barbarous assassinations. The

air was laden with delightful perfumes. The birds told their love with short, shrill twitters that made the deep silence of surrounding nature seem still more solemn and profound. At times, too, could be heard the gentle murmur of some rivulet forcing its way through obstructing stones; until, finding a smoother channel, it would flow on in silence. Bright-hued butterflies, beautiful as the flowers whose sweets they sipped, and freer than they, flitted hither and thither, while timid animals and shy birds, the coveted prey of the hunter, sported carelessly, even in the detested bridle-path. All, all was peace and love and delight in the earth and in the air! Heaven itself seemed to smile, like a father pleased with his children's happiness. One might fancy that the world had been just created. Unwearied Nature seemed a maiden in her fifteenth April.

All at once the animals, taking fright, fled or flew away from the path, and a cloud of dust dimmed the transparency of the atmosphere, on the road leading from the capital.

Man was approaching.

And since man was accustomed to pass by here, as we have said, giving the bad example of fearing to encounter his fellow-man, there was nothing either to surprise or offend the lord of creation in humble, irrational creatures also hastening in this way to shun his royal presence.

CHAPTER II.

OUR HERO.

THE before mentioned cloud of dust brought with it a gallant horseman followed by a muleteer on foot and by three superb mules laden with baggage.

The horseman, judging by his figure and attire and by the motley aspect of the said baggage, seemed to be at once a trader, a smuggler, and an Indian. Or it would have been easy to fancy him some powerful bandit chief, returning to his den with the rich booty of some successful expedition.

He was about twenty-seven years of age, of refined and elegant appearance, although he wore a jacket—a garment often used at that time in Andalusia by persons of very high rank; and so graceful, so vigorous, and so well-formed, that he might have served as a model for the famous statue of the "Fighting Gladiator."

The aforesaid jacket as well as the waistcoat and the trousers, or rather the riding breeches, which he wore, were of blue stockinet, fitting closely to the figure; his equipment terminated in buskins or gaiters of gray chamois leather with large spurs of chased silver, worthy, these latter, of a captain general. Large oblong pointed buttons, also of silver, adorned the sleeves of the jacket as far as the

elbow, and served to fasten the waistcoat. He wore for cravat a black crape handkerchief tied in a sailor's knot, and the rich sash of Chinese silk which girdled his slender waist was also black. In the cuffs and collar of his shirt gleamed costly brilliants, but more valuable than any of these was one which sparkled on the little finger of his left hand. Finally, his hat, which he had just taken off, was of the finest brown straw, with a broad brim and a high pointed crown, of a style much used in America and the Two Sicilies, and to which, in Granada, on account of its shape, the picturesque name of "sugar-loaf hat" is given.

This singular personage, whom his bizarre costume, semi-Andalusian, semi-foreign, suited to perfection, attracted attention even more than by the dress we have described, by the manly beauty of his countenance. That this had been of extraordinary fairness was still evident from the whiteness of that portion of his broad high forehead usually shaded by his hat; but the rest of his face had been so bronzed by the sun that its marble pallor had acquired a hue like that of old gold, whose even and quiet tone was not without a certain charm. His African eyes were large and well opened, seeming to sleep under the shade of their long lashes; when he opened them to their widest extent, however, excited by some sudden thought or event, so much light, so much vital energy, streamed from them, that his glance could not be supported. This glance united in itself the terrible majesty of the lion's, the

steadiness of the eagle's and the innocence of the child's, only that it was more melancholy than that of the child, more tender, on occasions, than that of these kings of the forest and the air. His luxuriant hair, black also, and cut very short behind, amply shaded his forehead, extending like a curled plume from left to right, setting off to advantage his haughty and impassioned features. His rare beauty was completed by a faultless profile, Syrian rather than Greek in character, a mouth statuesque, classic, Napoleonic, as audacious as it was thoughtful, and above all by a beard long, black, and wavy, the faithful transcript of the noble and celebrated Arab and Hebrew beards. To conclude, and to depict at a single stroke this interesting figure, we shall say that from his Oriental aspect, his expression of savage melancholy, his athletic frame, from the virile beauty of his countenance and the greatness of soul which revealed itself in his ardent gaze, an artist would have compared our hero, setting aside his grotesque dress and the profane accessories surrounding him, to the terrible John the Baptist, on his return from the wilderness at the age of twenty-nine.

The young man whom we have so minutely described was mounted on a superb Cordovan colt, black as a sloe, with a Spanish saddle, to the bow of which was fastened a small leathern valise, and a Mexican saddle-cloth or *sarape*, as it is called in Mexico, of varied and brilliant colors. Weapons he carried neither on his person nor on his horse, but, to speak

the truth, from one of the three mule loads we have mentioned hung, strapped together, four excellent guns, two of them with all the dignity of muskets, that might very well take any valiant man out of a difficulty.

Let us now say a word about the muleteer. His long trousers, of a summer fabric, the white linen jacket which he wore, hussar fashion, hanging from the shoulder, his crimson sash loosely knotted and trailing on the ground, his Calañése hat pushed far back on his head, his physiognomy, mobile and false as a comedian's, denoted the ill-conditioned native of the Malagan coast, who is born on the seashore under the open sky, grows up without house or home, is educated by the cleverest rascals of the old corrupt Mediterranean, and who is capable of all the good and all the evil possible to man—save to tell the truth twice in succession or to refuse a glass of brandy.

In conclusion, the loads of the three mules consisted of trunks, valises, boxes covered with matting, baskets and hampers of various sizes and shapes, and an infinity of other packages of strange materials and forms. Thick bundles of long bamboos and showy plumes gayly adorned, besides, each one of the loads; and, finally, on the very top and summit of the highest of these was a large tin cage in which the largest and greenest parrot that ever crossed the Atlantic was pining away of homesickness. No doubt the richly dressed young man, or the person whom he had robbed—supposing

that we have to do with a bandit—had recently arrived from America.

On these points we can as yet affirm nothing with certainty. The muleteer himself at this time knew nothing about them, as he afterward declared, attesting the statement with innumerable crosses. The only thing he knew at this time was that, on the preceding Tuesday, an innkeeper of Malaga had engaged him to conduct this voluminous baggage to the town to which we have already made reference; that the supposed Indian, trader, contrabandist, or highway robber had at that time been attracting for some eight or ten days the attention of the Malagans by his gallant bearing and his curious and costly attire; that the magnificent colt he rode was known and admired in the place as the property of the Marquis of — from whom the stranger might very well have purchased it; that the latter had put up at the best inn, where he had spent money lavishly, but that no one had visited him; that he had registered, on his arrival, in the book of the establishment, under the name of Manuel Venegas, and that the proprietor and the waiters had, in fact, addressed him as "Don Manuel," although winking at each other afterward, as if to express a doubt that such a person could be called by so Christian an appellation; and, in short, that, in the three and a half days during which they had been traveling together, no one had seemed to know the mysterious young man, who was, for his part, so reticent and so quietly determined not to

answer certain questions that the muleteer had been able to extract nothing from him but good cigars, at all times, plenty of rice and chickens at the inns, and many glasses of wine and brandy in every wine-shop and tavern they met on their way—things all the more to be appreciated as the generous donor neither smoked nor drank, and scarcely tasted food, himself.

One other observation only remains to be made, and that is that as the paths of the travelers coming from the capital and of those coming from the town did not cross, as we have already said, until they both arrived at this height, our hero and his attendant had encountered no one thus far on the Saturday referred to, although they now began to hear in the distance, the monotonous tinkling of mulebells and from time to time the eloquent apostrophe of some muleteer, of the kind that makes an animal give a switch to its tail and set off at a trot.

CHAPTER III.

THE CHORUS SPEAKS.

It was not long before there appeared on the opposite confine of this secluded scene the drove of beasts announced by sounds so unmistakable, ridden in procession by the travelers who, on the day we speak of, had had occasion to go from the town to the capital, for it was at that time the prudent custom to make this journey only in large caravans for mutual protection in case of an encounter with the robber-band of One-Eyed B—, Flat-Nosed X—, One-Armed H—, or of any other of those *marked by the hand of God*, who were always the chiefs most famous and most feared. And even thus, when an encounter took place, it generally resulted in the complete defeat of the confederated travelers.

On this occasion the procession was headed by a couple of oil-merchants of the Kingdom of Jaén, followed by several sumpter mules, over whose pack-saddles lay limply dozens of empty skins. Then came four asses belonging to the same drove, ridden by two women, commonplace in appearance and of middle age and rank, and by two men of the same style; one of whom wore a military cap glittering with the modest insignia of a sublieutenant;

the other wore black woolen stockings and had the complete cut of a sacristan, or volunteer assistant at the mass. Several youths followed—students, no doubt, returning to the University after the vacation of Holy Week—who went on foot for their own pleasure and to add to the confusion, for there were beasts in plenty which they could have ridden; and the procession was closed by the chief of the oil-merchants, whose ample sash doubtless contained the product in coin of the sale of the oil, for he rode a lively and skittish little mule exactly adapted to turn tail and escape at the very first sign of the approach of any lover of his neighbor's goods. The two ladies, who well deserved this title from their Olympic gravity, sat in capacious side-saddles, each provided with its feather pillow and indispensable percale quilt for greater decorum; the sub-lieutenant, who was corpulent, sat, woman-fashion, on the broad, rough, hempen pack-saddle, and the sacristan, although less stout, had for the same reason chosen to ride bareback on a donkey, off which he had already fallen two or three times.

We must hasten to remark that none of these altogether commonplace personages has any connection with the present drama, although they appear in it for an instant, as a part of the anonymous multitude whom the Greek dramatists call the chorus, who still gesticulate and sing in our operas and farces. Let the reader fix his attention then on the words of this chorus, without stopping to think of

their insignificant personalities, and he will save himself many puzzling conjectures.

"There they are!" exclaimed the sacristan, throwing himself to the ground, this time voluntarily, on perceiving the cloud of dust in which our hero came enveloped.

"Who do you say is coming, holy man?" asked the soldier.

"The robbers! Don't you see them! Don't you know that this is the classic ground for bandits?"

"Thieves, Doña Paz! Oh, happiness! Did I not tell you so?" joyfully cried one of the students, approaching the least ugly of the two women and beginning to dance before her donkey.

"Thieves!" "Heaven protect me!" "Most Holy Virgin!" "Blessed San Antonio!" "What is to become of me!" "And of me?" "Captain, don't forsake us!" screamed the two women in chorus.

"Weep not, oh, widows! Oh, forsaken goddesses! O Didos, abandoned by the cruel departed in the most flowery, yea, even the most seedy period of your maturity!" added another student. "You who have so much at stake in the conflict, ask of God what you most wish for. As for me, I am so unfortunate that robbers can do me neither good nor harm."

"Hands to your guns!" cried the sublieutenant, meanwhile, in a tone of command, to the two or three oil-merchants who carried firearms.

"Oh, no! It is better to submit," groaned the

sacristan. "Resistance is certain death. Am I not right, ladies?"

"Quite right."

"Stop, commandant," cried the two widows simultaneously; "stop, and let God's will be done!"

"Ladies, there is no danger," said one of the oil-merchants with simulated calmness. "When we come across real thieves I will give the order to break ranks."

"Who are those people, then?" asked the sub-lieutenant.

"Only a horseman," replied the carrier, "better mounted than any of us, accompanied by a servant on foot. It seems to me that the party is not one to create such alarm!"

"Do you know what I think?" exclaimed another student, glancing out of the corner of his eye at the professional warrior. "I think that that knight-errant has more courage than all of us put together, since he travels with less company."

"Hear that!" responded the sublieutenant, who was a Catalanian; "if I do not travel alone it is not because I need the protection of braggarts like you."

"Heavens, what men!" cried Doña Paz, pushing her donkey between the combatants. "They keep one all the time with one's heart in one's mouth."

"Don't be afraid, Doña Pavecita," said the student who had been insulted, clasping his arms around the buxom widow's knees; "to spare you an annoyance I am willing to make any sacrifice of my

pride. And how plump you are! and how handsome!"

"Insolent!" screamed the widow, urging on her beast, to free herself from the student. "If my Luis were living I should not find myself now in this situation. Wait for me, Doña Antonia! Ah, what boys! What boys!"

The horseman, meantime, had been gradually drawing nearer and was now close enough to be minutely examined by the members of the caravan, with which terminated the hundredth disturbance started during the day by the incorrigible students.

"The traveler is a handsome man," remarked Doña Paz to Doña Antonia.

"Too handsome!" murmured the latter, who had turned very pale, and who was rubbing her eyes as if unable to believe in the evidence of her senses.

"A handsome horse!" exclaimed the soldier.

"What there is remarkable about the man," observed one of the students, "is the deucedly queer dress he wears. He looks like one of those Hungarians who come to the town to mend pots and kettles."

"Silence, imprudent boy!" responded the soldier. "Don't you know that he can hear you?"

And in truth the handsome cavalier was already passing among the party, whom he saluted gravely and in silence, raising his hand to his hat.

"Good-afternoon!" "God be with you!" "God keep you!" graciously answered the travelers from

the town, as if very thankful that this meeting had not cost them dear.

"Good-by, gentlemen! The Virgin be with you!" responded the Malagan muleteer, apparently not a little relieved on his side also.

Meantime our good sacristan had stopped his donkey, and was looking open-mouthed after the mysterious traveler as he rode away. Finally, he crossed himself, put spurs to his beast, and joined the caravan, full of terror.

"Doña Paz! Doña Paz!" he cried, "did you not recognize that man?"

"No. But Doña Antonia, it seems, recognized him, and it has given her quite a turn. Who is he?"

"He is the Child of the Ball!"

"Heavens!" exclaimed Doña Paz. "What is that you say?"

"Just what you hear."

"Yes, yes, you are right. But how changed he is!"

"And who is the Child of the Ball?" asked the sublieutenant. "Some bandit?"

"No, Señor. Something worse than that. He is the devil in person, although he was brought up in the Church, and that in the very parish where I was formerly sacristan."

"Explain yourself, good friend."

"Mind what you say," interrupted Doña Paz, "Doña Antonia is listening to us, and Don Bernardino knows that she is the aunt, once removed, of the girl. In short, the gentleman understands what

I mean. I don't like to meddle in other people's affairs."

"The Child of the Ball," continued the sacristan, "is the bravest and the most terrible man that God ever created. A wild beast, Señor, a wild beast!"

"But, good Heavens!" persisted the soldier, "what atrocities has the man committed? And above all, how is it that he is allowed to remain at large, loose?"

"I will tell you. Everyone thought that he was dead. Eight years ago he went off to the Indies, and where he has come from now I do not know. A fine time there will be in the town when he arrives in it! Glad I am that I shall not be there then!"

"But, Señor Priest, or Señor—whatever you may be styled," responded the soldier; "tell us the whole story. What has that man done to make you call him a wild beast? Has he ever killed anyone? Has he ever robbed anyone? Has he ever set fire to any town?"

"No, Señor, he has done none of those things, but it is because he has not wished to do them. He has the strength of a Samson! Let it suffice you to know that it was he who killed the bear that committed such ravages in these mountains in the time of the Absolute King."

"If he killed the bear he showed himself to be a good man," responded the Catalanian. "Why then liken him to the devil?"

"I do not say that he is not a good man. What

I say is that he is not a man at all! Am I right, Doña Paz? And mind, I know him better than anyone else, and I even had a certain affection for him; for, as I said, I was the sacristan of the parish in which he was brought up. But I know him to be a lion, a tiger, a wild beast. And if you do not believe me ask La Dolorosa, or, rather, her family. Poor Soledad! Pleasant times she has before her now! The prettiest woman in the world!"

"Don Bernardino, hold your tongue, for Christ's sake!" interrupted the widow once more. "Doña Antonia is the aunt of Soledad, and she is listening to what we are saying, more dead than alive. Come and help me to divert her thoughts and to comfort her, and afterward, when we pass the Little Tavern, where all danger from robbers is over, we will ride on in advance of the others and then you can talk as much as you please. Oh, you shall see, Señor Lieutenant! Don Bernardino is right! Terrible things are going to happen in the town through that monster's return! I am sorry I shall not be there to witness them. For just imagine, the Child of the Ball, that is to say, Manuel Venegas, for such is his real name (for his father was a man of high rank, although very eccentric, descended, they say, from Moorish princes, whose wicked blood shows itself unmistakably in that boy, in spite of all his good sentiments), set his heart upon marrying, I mean to say, fell desperately in love——"

"Señora! hold your tongue, in the Virgin's name!" interrupted Don Bernardino in his turn; "Doña

Antonia does nothing but look at us and the poor thing is in a state that is pitiable to see."

"You are right. I will go stay with her. By and by I will tell you the whole story, lieutenant. Meantime, Señor Don Bernardino, come and ride beside me so that you may not profit by the occasion to cheat me out of the telling of the story. Wait for me, Antonita! Gee up, Piñon!"

We do not suppose that the reader has any desire to hear from the lips of Doña Paz the history of the first twenty years of the life of the Child of the Ball, related in the confused style of which the impetuous widow has just given us so striking a sample. We prefer, then, to narrate it ourselves, from the facts already known to the public; which done, we will hurry after our hero, in order to accompany him to the end of his journey, and enter with him the famous town which was his cradle, and in which the ever-tragic drama of his life was to have its denouement.

Let us bid farewell, then, to the sub-lieutenant, the two widows, the students, and the oil-merchants, of none of whom we shall ever hear again until we meet them on the Day of Judgment, in the famous Valley of Jehoshaphat.

Book 11.

ANTECEDENTS.

CHAPTER I.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

IN the memorable year 1808, there lived in the town a certain accomplished gentleman, an orphan and a bachelor, some five lusters old, called Don Rodrigo Venegas, who prided himself on his descent from that Reduan Venegas, a Moorish prince with a Christian strain, who owed his birth, as the reader doubtless already knows, to the romantic union of a scion of the noble house of Luque with the beautiful Princess Cetimerien, a descendant of the Prophet Mahomet.

Be this as it may, our Don Rodrigo had inherited from his parents a large estate and an old rambling mansion with palatial pretensions, on whose façade were sculptured the ambiguous coats-of-arms of that illustrious family, proclaiming ancient deeds of heroism such as now found few imitators in Spain, as a result of all which the good nobleman, a man of pure heart and lofty soul, pined away in that de-

cayed and stagnant town, not knowing what to do with his fortune or his blood, both eager to flow in noble and generous enterprises.

Imagine, then, the effect produced upon him by the sudden breaking out of the War of Independence. A Spaniard, after all, although in reality descended from unbaptized Spaniards, he took up arms immediately against the French; but, as he was not a man to be satisfied with doing only as much as everyone else did, he carried his patriotism to the extent of equipping, arming, and maintaining at his own cost, during four years, a volunteer cavalry troop; fighting at whose head he covered himself with glory in many famous battles. The result of this exemplary conduct was that when, after the victory of Arapiles and the entry of our armies into Madrid, Don Rodrigo returned to the town to recover from his fifth wound, having refused to accept any compensation from the National Government, he found his granaries empty, his fields unplowed since the year 1809, and his olive plantations and vineyards laid waste by the revengeful soldiery of Sebastiani. Nor did the loss sustained by his estate end here; he found himself also in debt, to the amount of four thousand dollars, to the richest and most merciless usurer of the town, to whom he had been obliged to send to borrow money, from Bailén, Ocaña, and Talavera, for the support of his well-deserving company of soldiers, and of no less a sum than ten thousand dollars besides, the amount of the interest and the interest on

the interest, computed according to the useful rule of compound interest.

The magnanimous Don Rodrigo bore all this with patience, and even with pride and joy, as he had borne the two bullet wounds and the three sword cuts received in defense of his native land, but not so certain persons of position, friends of Don Rodrigo, and known also to the money-lender, who, spontaneously desiring to serve him, begged the usurer to deduct something from this high interest, "in consideration of the distinction which the gallant Venegas had conferred upon the capital."

The usurer was one of those men so absolutely devoid of feeling that one wonders why they wish to live or to be rich; there was no human means, then, of inducing him to lessen, by so much as a maravedi, the amount of this exorbitant interest, or to make him understand how deserving of consideration Don Rodrigo was. The money-lender, whose name was Elias, but whom the people called Caiphas—answered that the question was not one of patriotism, but of arithmetic, and that he did not claim an *ochavo* more than the extravagant gentleman owed him, as was proved by documents which he treasured as carefully as if they were of cloth of gold, nor did it avail to tell him that his debtor, when signing those documents, had not considered how much the interest on the interest would amount to, in case of delay in payment, for all this was the *a, b, c*, of commercial transactions. Result: Don Rodrigo Venegas had to renew, for ten years,

the notes for the before-mentioned four thousand dollars, with the added ten thousand (total, fourteen thousand), and for six thousand dollars more which no one but Don Elias would take the risk of lending him, for the purpose of re-stocking his olive plantations and vineyards (total, twenty), and for five thousand more, the interest of the twenty thousand for the first year (total, twenty-five). Twenty-five thousand dollars, neither more nor less, when all he had actually received was ten thousand dollars!

The nobleman toiled hard during the years between 1813 and 1823 to pay off this debt, or at least the yearly interest of it, to avoid ruinous accumulations of compound interest, and, to say the truth, some years he succeeded in economizing from his income ten or twelve thousand reals, which he religiously handed over to the usurer (although the latter never demanded anything from him), but on the following year his tenants either did not pay him at all or they paid him only a trifle, on account of a poor harvest, a hail-storm, the locusts, or some other plague, often pretended, so that, instead of giving money to his creditor Don Rodrigo was obliged to ask fresh sums from him, "to keep things going until the next harvest," all under conditions suited to the gravity and urgency of the embarrassment—that is to say; burdensome and distressing in proportion as the case was pressing and desperate.

The only thing which Venegas did not even dream of doing, during all this time, was of working,

of engaging in trade, of creating some industry, of establishing some factory, of devising some means, in short, of earning money himself; and woe to him, woe to his name, woe to his honor, if he had taken such a course! I say this because such *trades* or *tricky employments* (literal) were then, and have continued to be, until very lately, pursuits unworthy of Andalusian gentlemen, born apparently only to recall in idleness the memory of the glorious exploits of their ancestors, to spend gayly and expeditiously all that those ancestors accumulated, and then to die of hunger in some corner of the family mansion, which has been already sold over their heads, without any other witness to their last agony than some rickety piece of furniture, such as the *parvenu* nobles of recent creation are eager to purchase, at their weight in gold, but which in those days were despised even by the defrauded usurers.

So true is all this (although not entirely applicable to our Don Rodrigo, who, as we already know, had done something great and noble in the world), that only yesterday, as one may say, all the worthy merchants and mechanics of every city, town, or village in Andalusia were strangers from Santander, Galicia, or Rioja. Even the old usurer, called in the town "Caiphaz" (as if to signify that whoever once put himself in his hands might be certain of being crucified), was a native of Rioja, and had come to the town to sell, on commission, Escaray and Pradoluengo cloth, managing so skillfully that at the end of two years he opened on his own account a large

shop for the sale of all kinds of fabrics, at the end of four years he was adjudged the estates of several gentlemen who had failed in their payments, at the end of six years he built a fine house, standing by itself, like a castle, and transferred the shop to another Riojan in order to devote himself exclusively to the business of usury, and at the end of twenty years he was master of half the lands conquered from the Moors by the so-called first settlers of the town, and partitioned among them by the Catholic Sovereigns.

To return to Don Rodrigo (which is not going very far from Don Elias, in whose clutches we left him), we will say that during the ten years intervening between the year of his return from the war and that in which his debt, with its ruinous accumulation of interest, fell due, he had married, through pity, rather than love, an orphan of a very distinguished but very poor family; he had had by her a son; had become a widower shortly after the birth of the child, when the pity that had been the motive of his marriage had changed to love; and in both the one and the other state, following the counsels of his prudent wife, he had given up one after another all his former luxuries; selling his horses, jewels, beautiful furniture, costly attire, and a great deal of chased plate, as well as dismissing many of his servants, and reducing his expenses within the narrowest limits compatible with the dignity of his class—by whom, as well as by all the townspeople (be it said without offense to anyone), he was

loved and respected the more the poorer he became.

In exchange, the general aversion which Don Elias (like all who traffic in and prosper on the misery of their fellow-beings) inspired, converted into hatred and reprobation when he demanded from Don Rodrigo the ten thousand dollars interest, bordered, in 1823, on detestation and indignation, through a presentiment that this inextinguishable debt, this species of cancer cruelly fomented by the usurer, was on the point of consuming, if it had not already consumed, the large fortune of the Venegases. The rich miser lived, consequently, shut up in his house, not venturing to leave it, even to go to mass, through fear of the slights of persons of all classes, and more especially of the insults of the common people and the children, who called him "Caiphas" to his very face, and he passed there month after month, hating and abusing the good woman—a former servant of his—whom he had married, and petting and heaping pearls and diamonds upon a beautiful daughter, now eight years old, who had been born to him in his old age, and whom he adored with his five senses and his three faculties, or what, in other men, is called the soul.

Things being in this condition, and when the latest settlement of accounts showed that Don Rodrigo was in debt to Don Elias (this is no exaggeration; the reader may cast up the account for himself), to the amount of one hundred and forty-seven thousand two hundred and nine dollars (about three

millions of reals); when the unhappy gentleman calculated that the produce of the sale by public auction, even at a high price, of all his farms, vineyards, and olive-plantations, and even the ancient mansion itself, would fall far short of that sum, when, patient and courageous as ever, and thoughtful of the future of his son, he had resolved (at the age of forty-one!) to ask an ensign's epaulet, in recompense of his services in the War of Independence, and go to fight against those other French soldiers who were at the time desecrating his native land, it happened that early one morning the solitary house of the usurer was seen to be blazing on all its four sides.

It was with the utmost difficulty that the money-lender succeeded in escaping from the flames, carrying in his arms his half-asphyxiated child, and followed by his terrified wife, nor was it possible for him to save either furniture, or clothes, or jewels, or money, or even the precious papers representing the large sums owed to him by Don Rodrigo and various other persons. And the worst of the matter was that the fire could not be thought to be accidental, nor did anyone so consider it; that, in any case, the whole town regarded it either with pleasure, or with cold indifference; that the guilds of masons and carpenters (there had never been in the town either firemen or fire-engines) made very little effort to extinguish it, notwithstanding the exhortations of the authorities, and although Don Elias, who had taken refuge in the house of the Alcalde,

cried out that it was all the work of his infamous debtors, so that the receipts and promissory notes for the sums which they owed him might be destroyed in the flames, and that they might afterward repudiate their debts.

Incidents and events of so serious and criminating a nature roused from his tranquil slumbers that morning the noble and valorous Venegas, who—we will not say without commending himself to God or to the devil, but, we will say, obeying a generous impulse and declaring that the usurious interest of his debt did not exempt him from the gratitude which he owed the man from whom he had borrowed so much money, and from whose correspondents he had received most opportune assistance in fighting against Napoleon from 1808 to 1813—ran to the burning house, harangued a group of masons, rushed through the smoke and flames, climbed up a ladder to the first story, made his way to the office of Don Elias, which was one of the rooms that stood in most imminent danger, entered it against the remonstrances of the very workmen who had helped him to break down the door, and seized an antique writing-desk in which he had often seen the usurer put promissory notes and receipts, for safe keeping, and threw it out of the window into the street. Shortly afterward Venegas himself emerged from that volcano, amid the applause of the fickle multitude, his face and hands horribly burned, and his clothing, which had been partially consumed by the flames, still smoking. Without waiting for his wounds to

be dressed he at once examined the contents of the writing-desk, which had been broken into pieces by the fall, possessed himself of all the papers it contained, and carried them to the house of the Alcalde, where he arrived almost lifeless.

"Take these, Señor Don Elias," he said to his odious creditor—who was filled with terror at seeing him arrive in this condition, thinking he had come with the intention of killing him—"take these. Here are not only all my own promissory notes and receipts—which I could have drawn up again, to vindicate myself from the vile calumny which to-day charged me with being a swindler and an incendiary, but also those of your other creditors. We are now quits, as regards those favors which money can never repay. I am about to die. As for the material part of our accounts, take possession of all my property, and forgive me—if it should not suffice for the complete liquidation of my debt to you."

So spoke Don Rodrigo, and when he had uttered the words he fell to the floor, seized by the terrible convulsion called tetanus.

A few hours later he was a corpse.

CHAPTER II.

QUITTANCE.

WE need not describe, for it may easily be imagined, the feeling of profound sorrow, mingled with enthusiastic admiration, which the death of the good nobleman produced throughout the town and in the neighboring villages, nor the magnificent funeral which his peers gave him at their own cost, supposing it to have been attended with any cost, which, thank Heaven, it was not, for even the chapel band of the cathedral gave their services gratis, and the wax-chandler refused to make any charge for the wax consumed, and all the parishes offered spontaneously to share with that of the deceased, the distinguished honor of giving burial and repose to those glorious remains. We will only say, in order to show how far the public delirium went, that, on the afternoon of the funeral services (at which the usurer did not assist), no one doubted that Caiphas, in recompense of Don Rodrigo's sublime action, would be satisfied to repay himself the ten or twelve thousand dollars which he had actually lent the deceased gentleman, and a moderate and legal interest on this sum, leaving the remainder of the estates for the unhappy orphan, who, at the age of

ten, was left alone in the world, without any other resource than the charity of the benevolent.

Those enthusiasts were soon undeceived, however. Don Elias did not even wait until the ruins of his house (in which, be it said between ourselves, he had lost only the value of the building, six or eight thousand dollars' worth of clothes and furniture, his daughter's jewels, and a little money in coin) had done smoking, but, on the very day of the funeral, presented to the court the promissory notes and receipts of the deceased nobleman, demanding the entire amount of the debt, that is to say, three million reals in round numbers.

It was with great reluctance that the judge declared this claim to be legal, but the usurer had taken so many precautions and the noble debtor had allowed himself to be so securely bound, that there was no alternative but to put up all the property at public auction. Nor were there wanting now good intentions on the part of other noblemen and persons of means, and meetings were held, and discourses pronounced, and resolutions unanimously adopted, recognizing the expediency of attending the auction and bidding the property up to the clouds, bearing jointly the losses that might result from such action, all with the purpose of securing decorously a piece of bread for the son of Venegas. But we know what happens in these cases. There was so much talk that out of it arose disputes among the intending benefactors, as to which of them was disposed to make the greatest sacrifice, and as to

what were each one's secret motives, and as to what had occurred once on a similar occasion, and as to the ideas and the political acts of Don Rodrigo at the stormy period of the invasion; and hence resulted so many disagreements that several persons, who also owed large sums of money to Caiphas, ceased to attend the meetings and the time passed until the day appointed by the law arrived, and as the gentlemen had not yet come to an understanding, the auction was attended by no one. The vineyards, then, the olive-plantations, the farms, the house, the furniture, the wardrobe, and even the sword of the well-deserving patrician were knocked down to the money-lender, through the agency of the law, and to the great sorrow of the public, for one hundred thousand and odd dollars.

"I lose a million!" said the terrible old man as he signed the deed of sale. "But—what is to be done! The property of the wasteful and extravagant Venegas is not worth an *ochavo* more."

"You lose nothing, on the contrary you gain nearly two millions," a member of the ecclesiastical court answered him severely. "True, that in exchange—as everyone expects—you will make a present of a good sum of money to the innocent orphan, take charge of his education, and provide for his future."

"Provide? I? What are you talking about? I have enough to do to provide for my daughter! And as for presents of good sums of money, the admirers of the defunct hero can make them, on the

day of judgment. It is very easy to say what others ought to do!"

"But consider that the boy is left a beggar."

"At his age I was a beggar too," replied the usurer, turning his back on the speaker.

The indignation of the townspeople against Don Elias reached its height when these particulars were made public, and well it was that the astute Riojan, whose house had been reduced to ashes, still resided in the house of the Alcalde; for had not this been the case it would have gone hard with him. Nevertheless, as there is no one in the world more courageous than a usurer backed by the law, and as, on the other hand, our good Caiphas was not by nature a coward, but only a prudent man, who guarded his millions carefully, and took infinite pleasure in adding to them, he resolved to install himself at once in the ancestral mansion of the Venegases, which now belonged to him, and to this end he ordered some repairs to be made to the house, consisting in fortifying it strongly and providing it with numerous bolts, locks, and bars.

Something was said on this occasion, also, by the workmen, about holding meetings and adopting resolutions to refuse to work at the repairs of the venerable mansion, but Don Elias, who heard of this, announced that he would pay the workmen a little higher wages, in consideration of the dearness of bread, by which simple means he found men in abundance ready to do his work, and he was very soon able to transfer himself with his wife and

daughter to his new house, choosing for the purpose a night on which it rained in torrents and not a human being was in the streets.

Once in the ancient palace, and having bolted all the doors, he drew a deep breath of relief, as if it was his intention not to set foot in the street again for four or five years to come, and said to his wife:

"To-morrow I shall write to my banker in the town to send the child five thousand dollars' worth of clothes, jewels, and toys. You and I can manage with anything."

And he kissed his daughter a dozen times, and laid himself down in the bed that had been Don Rodrigo's, on the mattress which still preserved the impress left on it by his dead body.

The miser's wife did not wish to occupy, in that couch, which had twice been a deathbed, the place of her who in years past had been the happy wife of the honorable nobleman, and, with the pretext of having a great deal to do, she spent the night nodding in a chair.

And Soledad, the petted child, the beloved daughter of Caiphas, slept in the bed which had been that of the forsaken son of Venegas.

Where, meantime, was the poor orphan, the disinherited boy of ten, the child in whose luxurious cot the millionaire of eight springs was dreaming of her promised toys?

At this point it is that our story really begins.

CHAPTER III.

HOW A CHILD CEASED TO BE ONE.

MANUEL, for so the orphan was called, was, on the fatal morning on which his father left him asleep in bed, to go and rush into the flames which were consuming the house of Don Elias, a beautiful boy, white and rosy as the fairest dawn, and gay and sportive as some careless young forest animal. Don Rodrigo had bestowed the utmost care upon his bringing up, not centered yet, however, in instructing him in any branch of literature, not even in reading or writing—for which he said there was still time enough and to spare—but in fortifying and hardening his already robust physical organization, practicing him in rude exercises of agility and strength, teaching him to ride and to swim, obliging him to walk long distances in interminable hunting expeditions, and explaining to him, by the way, the mysteries of the Sierra, the botany of the mountaineers, the medicine of the farmers, the astronomy of the shepherds, the habits of the animals, the manner of hunting and killing them, or taking them alive and taming them, and many other secrets of rural and mountain life; whence it resulted that Don Rodrigo and the boy were always together and that they loved each other and treated each other

rather like two brothers, two comrades, two chums, than like father and son.

The petted boy knew nothing of the ruin that had overtaken his house, nor of the consequent anxieties of Don Rodrigo (who, as we have seen, had brought him up as a poor boy, foreseeing that he would one day be poor), and in the shelter of this ignorance his childhood had passed tranquil, happy, joyous, even, as far as the life of a boy can be joyous who has never known a mother, when suddenly and at once there descended upon his head all the misfortunes which it is possible for humanity to suffer. On the same day, in the space of a few hours, he saw brought in from the street, burned and senseless, the idol, the lord, the companion, and the only friend of his life; he witnessed his dreadful death, without receiving a single glance from his fixed eyes, a single counsel or kiss from his convulsed lips; he learned of the existence of Cai-phas and of the terrible tragedy of the fire, as well as of its dreadful origin; he knew that he was as poor as the barefooted mendicants that beg from door to door; he comprehended that he must bid farewell forever to those walls and all they contained, including the objects most closely associated with the memory of the author of his being; he beheld, as in a dream, the people of the town assembled in his house around Don Rodrigo's corpse, guarding it as if it belonged to them, until finally they lifted it on their shoulders and bore it away, first giving him many kisses, and saying many

kind things to him, which had no meaning for him, and he remained there alone, silent, stupefied, seated in a corner of the death-chamber, in the attitude of one who neither expects nor has reason to expect the coming of anyone.

When night at last arrived, the first night of orphanhood; when the bell had ceased to toll, and the distant strains of the funeral music had died away; when even the deepening shadows reminded him that he was now alone upon the earth; when he was beginning to fancy that he himself had died and been buried, he heard a hoarse, gruff voice, the voice of a stout, plain-featured man in priestly garb, saying lugubriously:

"Where are you, boy? Why have you not made a light? Come along with me. I will take charge of you now, and let the future be as God wills! Come home with me."

Manuel followed the priest, like an automaton, or rather like a poor dog who has been left without its master.

CHAPTER IV.

A COUNTRY PRIEST.

LET us hasten to say something, very little, regarding the priest, before plunging into the story of the boy who thus became his ward.

Don Trinidad Muley was one of those priests of the old Spanish type who are loved and esteemed by their parishioners and by all who know them, irrespective of political opinions, or even of religious beliefs; priests who, being neither liberal nor the reverse, or rather, because they have no opinion at all with regard to the things of Cæsar, but a very exalted idea regarding the things of God, never lost this love and esteem, either in the national outbreak of 1808; nor in the absolutist reaction of 1814; nor in the revolutionary frenzy of 1820; nor later, when Angoulême came; nor in consequence of the Riot of the Granja, nor of any of the later vicissitudes so prolific of discord between Church and state; priests indigenous to the soil, so to say, who are inferior to none in love of country; who are neither cosmopolitan, European, nor even ultramontane—on which account they seldom bequeath their names to history; priests, in short, of the class of old-fashioned Catholics, who know nothing about politics or philosophy, who neither have themselves

nor exact from others subtle theological conceptions with which to explain the mind of the Author of the Universe, nor inflexible scholastic formulas regarding society and the laws that govern it, but solely and simply the real and efficient practice of all the Christian virtues.

The example now before us was at once so simple and unaffected, so humane and so valiant, so open-minded and pure-hearted, so eminently a spiritual father, in essence, presence, and power, that, just as he performed the functions of parish priest of Santa María de la Cabeza, scattering benefits, moral and material, around him, as far as his means permitted, he would have performed those of a Hebrew, Mahometan, Protestant, or Chinese priest, to the great edification and admiration of his parishioners. Let us say, then, to sum up his qualities, positive and negative, that he was a genuinely good man, full of innate charity, illuminated by the Word of Christ, having a profound hope in another and a better life, like everyone who has a lofty soul incapable of being satisfied with the vain joys of earth; poor, indeed, in polite learning, but not so in worldly wisdom and in knowledge of the human heart; almost destitute of imagination, but not of sound logic and common sense; who, perhaps, could not preach a good sermon on dogma—nor did he think it necessary, in his parish, to enter into such intricate questions—but who charmed and improved his auditors from the pulpit, by his paternal attitude and his tender exhortations to righteousness, as well as by

his good example. He was not, indeed, a St. Augustine, a St. Thomas, or a St. Ignatius, but rather a St. Cayetano, a St. Diego de Alcalá, or a St. John the Evangelist, although less learned and more commonplace than any of these, or than the generality of the priests, deputies, and curates of the diocese.

It was not the fault of the worthy priest's will that he did not know a greater number of texts from the Bible or the Holy Fathers, or that he jumbled those he did know, when he attempted to make a fine discourse, but rather the fault of his treacherous memory, so refractory to study that no one could understand how the good Muley—a Moorish name, which still exists in the place—had been able to learn Latin enough to pass his examinations and receive ordination, and everybody wondered retrospectively at the patient and now defunct dominic, who, with mallet and chisel, no doubt, had labored assiduously enough at that hard head to succeed in driving into it the *musa*, *musæ*. This was all the evil that could be said of Don Trinidad. In exchange, there was not in the town, nor for a hundred leagues around, anyone who surpassed him in willingness to give his dinner or his bed to a friendless beggar; to nurse the infected; to pass hour after hour in cheering conversation, full of salutary advice, with the prisoners in the jail; to spend, on snowy days, all the money he possessed in buying shoes for barefooted children; to take poor old men, who were growing crippled in their dark cab-

ins, out walking in the sunshine, leaning on his arm; in reconciling, by dint of tears or blows, married couples who had quarreled, making them embrace each other cordially; enemies who were ready to cut each other's throats; the poor with the rich, when bread was growing dear and riot threatening; everyone with his cross; the sad with their sadness, the sick with their malady, the criminal with his punishment, the dying with death. The feeling entertained for him, then, in the town, was one of veneration bordering on worship, in spite of his plain, familiar, and even jocular manner with both great and small, when there was no cause for seriousness; and everyone respected his ignorance as if it were a species of innocence, as we love and admire the uncultivated and smiling mountain-side, for the reason that all there is natural and spontaneous, the legitimate offspring of God, and not of human toil and speculation.

Thus the bishop was justified in appointing him rector of Santa María de la Cabeza, from which parish the most quarrelsome quarter of the town, where almost all the working people lived, took its name; therefore we can understand the profound esteem which the deceased Don Rodrigo and the worthy Don Trinidad had always entertained for each other, although they met but seldom; therefore we can comprehend the step taken by the latter in sheltering and adopting the nobleman's son, without consulting or discussing it with anyone; and for this reason, also, we shall find it necessary, later on, to

speak again of this excellent man, saying, at the same time, a few words about his house, his oratory, his habits, and even his simple housekeeper.

These words we do not say at the present moment, for the son of Venegas, the boy who is soon to be known as the Child of the Ball, now claims our attention.

CHAPTER V.

THE USURER'S CREDITOR.

THE unfortunate boy seemed to have turned to ice, as a consequence of the cruel and unexpected blows of fate that had fallen on him, contracting a pallor like that of death, which he never again lost. No one had paid any attention to the unhappy child in the first moments of his anguish, nor noticed that he neither groaned, nor sighed, nor wept, and when they at last went to him they found him convulsed and rigid, like a petrification of grief; although he walked about, heard and saw, and covered his wounded and dying father with kisses. Thus he had not shed a single tear, either during the death agony of that beloved being, nor when he kissed his cold face after he was dead; nor when he saw them carry him away forever, nor when he left the house in which he had been born; nor when he found himself sheltered, through charity, in the house of a stranger. Some praised his courage, others criticised his insensibility. Mothers pitied him profoundly, instinctively divining the cruel tragedy that was being enacted in the orphan's heart, for want of some tender and compassionate being to make him weep, weeping with him.

Nor did Manuel utter a single word from the mo-

ment when he saw his beloved father brought in dying; he neither responded to the affectionate questions put to him by Don Trinidad, after the latter had taken him to his house; nor was the sound of his voice ever heard during the first three years which he spent in the priest's holy company; and everybody now thought he would remain dumb forever, when one day, in the church of which his protector was the priest, the sacristan observed him standing before a beautiful image of the Child of the Ball, which was there adored, and heard him saying in melancholy accents:

"Child Jesus, why do not you speak, either?"

Manuel was saved. The drowning boy had raised his head above the engulfing waters of his grief. His life was no longer in danger. So at least it was believed in the parish.

From that time the orphan occasionally spoke a few words—very few, indeed—to the priest or the housekeeper, to signify to them his gratitude, love, and obedience, but none that had reference to his never-to-be-forgotten misfortunes; all which Don Trinidad Muley, the sacristans, and the acolytes thought to be of good omen.

As for his reason, no one had ever feared for it during the three years of his voluntary, or involuntary dumbness. The housekeeper, only, had said from the beginning, and always continued to say, that there had remained in Manuel a strain of madness—only a strain—as a consequence of not having wept when he had lost his father. On this point

we can affirm nothing with certainty ; for, among the papers from which we have collected our facts, there is none giving a medical opinion on this subject, and to decide, in our poor world, as to who is in his right mind and who is mad is a more delicate matter than might at first be imagined. Let each of our readers settle the question to his own satisfaction, judging from the events which we are now about to relate.

Toward strangers, from whom, whenever they came in contact with him, he always received demonstrations of pity and kindness, the orphan continued to maintain the same glacial reserve as before, employing to this end the following evasive phrase, stereotyped on his disdainful lips: "Let me alone, now"; having said which, in tones of moving entreaty, he would go on his way, not without awakening superstitious feelings in the minds of the persons whom he thus shunned.

Still less did he lay aside, in this salutary crisis, the profound sadness and precocious austerity of his character, or the obstinate persistence with which he clung to certain habits. These were limited, thus far, to accompanying the priest to the church; to gathering in the fields flowers or aromatic herbs with which to adorn the image of the Child of the Ball (before which he would spend hour after hour, plunged in a species of ecstasy), and to climbing to the top of the neighboring mountain in search of those herbs and flowers when, owing to the severity of the heat or cold, they were not to be found in the fields.

This adoration, while in consonance with the religious principles inculcated in him from his cradle by the deceased nobleman, far exceeded what would be natural and human in persons extraordinarily devout. It was a fraternal and submissive love, like that which he had entertained for his father; it was a confused mixture of familiarity, protection, and idolatry, very similar to the feeling which the mothers of men of genius entertain for their illustrious sons; it was the respectful and protecting tenderness which the strong warrior bestows on the youthful prince; it was an identification of himself with the image; it was pride; it was elation as for a personal good. It seemed as if this image symbolized for him his tragic fate, his noble origin, his early orphanhood, his poverty, his cares, the injustice of men, his solitary state in the world, and perhaps, too, some presentiment of his future sufferings.

Probably, nothing of all this was clear at the time to the mind of the hapless boy, but something resembling it must have been the tumult of confused thoughts that palpitated in the depths of that child-like, unwavering, absolute, and exclusive devotion. For him there was neither God, nor the Virgin, neither saints nor angels; there was only the Child of the Ball, not with relation to any profound mystery, but in himself, in his present form, with his artistic figure, his dress of gold tissue, his crown of false stones, his blond head, his charming countenance, and the blue-painted globe which he held in his hand, and which was surmounted by a little

silver-gilt cross, in sign of the redemption of the world.

And this was the cause and reason why the acolytes of Santa María de la Cabeza, first, then, all the boys of the town, and, finally, the more respectable and sedater persons bestowed on Manuel the extraordinary name of "The Child of the Ball"; we know not whether by way of applause of such vehement idolatry and to commit him, as it were, to the protection of the Christ Child himself, or as a sarcastic antiphrasis—seeing that this appellation is sometimes used in the place as a term of comparison for the happiness of the very fortunate; or as a prophecy of the valor for which the son of Venegas was to be one day celebrated, and the terror he was to inspire; since the most hyperbolical expression that can be employed in that district, to extol the bravery and power of anyone, is to say that "he does not fear even the Child of the Ball."

However this may be, such was the name generally given to the handsome orphan, when he recovered the use of his speech at the age of thirteen; an epoch in which he acquired a new habit, as fixed and steady as all his other habits, which withdrew him, to some extent, from his mystic adoration and made prudent people foresee grave and even fatal consequences.

This was the habit into which he fell of seating himself at the same hour every afternoon on a bench at the door of a certain house, in front of the ancient palace of the Venegases, where the usurer, Don Elias,

still resided. There he would sit quietly by himself, from two o'clock, the hour at which he finished dining, until nightfall, with his eyes fixed on the large windows of the building, or on the escutcheon above the door; nor could the curiosity of the townspeople, who walked through this solitary quarter with the sole object of seeing him keeping this significant watch, divert his attention; nor did the boys of his own age, who had already felt the power of his iron grip, dare to make their appearance there, nor would the entreaties of the prudent Don Trinidad Muley have sufficed to make him abandon this dangerous caprice.

The windows and shutters of the famous house were always closed, with the exception of one window, which had short white curtains close to the glass. It was that of the room which had been his father's study. But the curtains never moved, and nothing could be seen through them.

Nor did any living soul ever enter or leave the house, during these hours, through the great door, also closed as if the house were uninhabited, or as if, behind this door, there were not a porch with another door, and on this door a knocker.

At last, one afternoon, Manuel saw a little old man, shabbily dressed, whom he remembered to have seen in years past, counting large piles of money in his father's study, leave the palace and re-enter it shortly afterward. Doubtless he was Don Elias's servant and collector.

The little old man must, on his side, have recog-

nized the boy, or at least known who he was, for he made a long detour, both in going and in returning, in order to avoid passing near him, glanced askance at him with a sort of terror, and looked back several times as if to satisfy himself that the boy was not following him—just as superstitious people do when they fancy they are followed by a ghost.

On the following afternoon the orphan observed a shadow moving behind the curtains we have mentioned, and presently he saw one of the curtains drawn slightly aside, and the severe countenance of another old man, whom he did not know, and who fixed upon him two eyes like two poniards, pressed close to the windowpane.

“That is my oppressor!” cried Manuel, giving a spring like a wild beast and advancing toward that part of the building.

But the curtain was drawn again, and the vision disappeared.

The boy returned to his seat, his fury subsiding as suddenly as it had burst forth. Everything in him had this lion-like character of swiftness and strength—rage and repose, grief and joy, resentment and forgiveness alike—as we shall see later on.

The domestic government, and perhaps also the conscience of the Riojan, must have been greatly disturbed by the species of siege laid to him by his diminutive creditor, who presented himself here to demand his estate, the house in which he had been born, his father's life and the escutcheon of his ancestors; and it must have greatly terrified the

women of the house to see him sitting on that bench hour after hour, like a silent feud, like a living accusation, or like a perpetual protest, precursor of inevitable vengeance. Certain it is that two or three days after that on which the usurer and his victim had exchanged their first glance of eternal hatred, there issued from the ancient mansion a woman of about fifty, still handsome, although faded and worn with toil, and in appearance and dress rather like a rich peasant than a lady. This was Señá María Josefa, formerly the servant and now the wife of the money-lender.

Manuel divined who she was, although he had never before seen her, either; but—we know not whether through delicacy of instinct, or because during the last three years he had often heard the poor woman's qualities extolled—he felt neither aversion nor disgust at sight of her.

But when he saw that the wife of Don Elias, after assuring herself that no one was observing her, either in the street or from any of the windows, approached him resolutely, and seated herself at his side, he experienced an indescribable feeling of anguish, and rose to go away.

The woman detained him, saying:

“Don't go, Manuel, I bear you no ill-will. I have come in a friendly spirit. Tell me, my child, what do you want here? Do you need anything? Why do you wear that dress, unsuited to your rank? Do you wish me to give you some money?”

The boy wore the dress of the peasantry, because

such was his wish ; for it is to be observed that when he had outgrown the fine clothes which he had taken with him from his house, and Don Trinidad had wished to have others of the same kind made for him, he had opposed his doing so energetically, saying :

“No, Señor Rector, I cannot pay for gentlemen’s clothes. Dress me like a poor boy.” He abstained, however, from giving this or any other explanations to Señá Maria Josefa, and instead of answering her, or sitting down again, he began to write on the ground with the toe of his boot, attentively observing the letters he traced.

The woman went on after a pause :

“That does not mean to say that the jacket is not becoming to you. You look well in anything, for you are a handsome boy, with eyes like two suns, and besides, his reverence—may God reward him ! keeps you very neat and decent. But I should like to do something more for you, to buy you a great many things, to send you to the capital to learn a profession there, at my expense. In short, although I have already myself spoken to Don Trinidad, who thinks that you and I ought to arrange these matters between us—tell him all this from me, that you may convince yourself that I am not deceiving you—if you make up your mind to be friends with me, you shall see that it will be better for all of us. Won’t you answer me, Manuel? What are you thinking of?”

The boy made no answer to this address, either,

but continued to write with the toe of his boot on the ground, where could now be read his father's name, Rodrigo.

"What are you writing there?" asked Don Elias's wife, after another pause. "I don't know how to read, but I have heard with a great deal of pleasure that you have at last recovered your speech. Answer me, then. If you come here every afternoon it is because you desire something. Tell me frankly what it is. Or if not, take this; that will be better. Spend this on whatever you may need."

And she held out to him a red cord purse through whose distended meshes shone many pieces of gold. It must have contained at least six thousand reals.

Manuel effaced with his boot the name of the deceased gentleman and began to write another name, which proved to be that of the mother he had never known—Manuela. That is to say, he did not even deign to look at the purse. On the contrary, in order to make it clearly understood that he would accept nothing, he thrust his hands into the pockets of his trousers.

"You are either very vindictive or very proud, Manuel," then said Señá María Josefa bitterly. "Evidently you think we are all your enemies, but in that you are mistaken. I have a daughter whom I adore as your father adored you, who said to my husband this morning after breakfast: 'See, papa, you must forgive that handsome boy who sits there in front of the house every afternoon, and say yes to whatever he asks of you. I am very sorry for

him! They say that formerly he was richer than we, and that the bed in which I sleep was his.' So you see, boy, you see! Even my Soledad takes an interest in you!"

Manuel had raised his head and left off writing on the ground.

"Tell me, Señora," he then said quietly, "how old is the child you speak of?"

"She is almost twelve," responded the mother, with ineffable sweetness.

Manuel relapsed apparently into his former abstraction; but he wrote on the ground, with the tip of his boot, Soledad.

"I suppose that you are now convinced that you can take this trifle," resumed the good woman, holding out the money to him again.

Manuel drew back a step, and said coldly and sadly:

"Señora, we have talked enough."

And turning on his heel he walked slowly away, soon disappearing from view around a corner of the street.

The usurer's wife let fall on her lap the hand which held the now useless gold, and remained very thoughtful. Presently she arose with a deep sigh and re-entered the house which we do not know whether or not she dared to call *her house*.

As for the boy, before five minutes were over he was seated again on the bench with his eyes fixed on the usurer's windows.

CHAPTER VI.

SOLEDAD.

TWO days after this scene Manuel changed the time of his daily visit to the little square of the Venegases from the afternoon to the morning, presenting himself there at nine o'clock; that is to say, after the termination of the daily parochial service.

Why this change? Did the boy suppose that at that hour more persons would be entering and leaving the house of Caiphas, and that there would consequently be more material for his observations? Or had he ascertained that it would then be easy for him to see the girl of whom the usurer's wife had spoken to him, that champion of twelve who pitied him so profoundly, that never-to-be-forgotten Soledad, who had called him handsome?

Of this we know nothing. But the fact was that on the morning on which he made this change Manuel saw the money-lender's servant and collector going into and coming out of the house several times, now alone, now accompanied by notaries or other more or less prominent persons of the town, and that, at about twelve o'clock, the same servant left the mansion again, and, after many turns, and much hesitation, entered the girls' school situated at the other end of the long plaza, distant about a

hundred paces from the door of the palace and the spot opposite it, where the besieger had sat himself down.

The heart of the sagacious orphan gave a bound, for his hunter's instinct, and his old habit of guiding himself in the Sierra by signs and conjectures, warned him that the daughter of Caiphas was about to appear before his eyes.

And so it was; a few moments later the timid collector issued from the school, holding by the hand a beautiful girl, whose elegant carriage and sprightly and graceful movements, accompanied by joyous bursts of laughter, and the silvery sounds of an angelic voice, filled the son of Venegas with amazement.

"What is the reason," the unhappy boy seemed to ask himself, "that this girl is not sad when I am so?"

The girl suddenly became quite silent, doubtless either because the servant had warned her of the presence of Manuel or because she herself had at that moment caught sight of him. There reigned, then, in the square a profound silence, which to the orphan seemed like the silence of death, and Soledad proceeded on her way without laughing or talking, and with an air of gravity and decorum which inspired him who was the cause of it with the deepest grief.

The gloomy youth observed, presently—and this rejoiced his heart—that the daughter of Caiphas was watching him furtively, and that a sort of silent

struggle was taking place between the old man, who was trying to draw her by the hand to the side of the street on which the palace stood, and the girl, who tried to approach gradually the other side, in order to pass close to the mysterious personage.

The latter gazed at her fixedly, without so much as winking an eyelash, with the admiration and boldness, but also with the gentleness of the lion who, satiated with his sanguinary daily banquet, should see passing by his cave a distressed gazelle. Many other things were in the eyes and the heart of Manuel, although his consciousness could not mirror them as yet clearly—pride, when he remembered that he was indebted to the lovely and now reserved child for spontaneous championship, flattering eulogies, and the sweetest pity; remorse and sorrow, that through him she should have left off laughing and talking; there was an indescribable species of tenderness, born of this same generous sorrow; there was, finally, a desire to appear less hostile to her, together with jealousy and envy of those who were not debarred—as he was, from the enjoyment of her friendship and her innocent gayety. That is to say that, by a miracle of precocity, of which there have been several celebrated examples (among others, that of Lord Byron, who shed tears of love, at the age of ten, for the daughter of an enemy of his family), there were in the orphan's eyes and heart, from the very instant in which he first saw the daughter of the oppressor of his house, the puissant germ of that fatal and inevitable love, the bitter transforma-

tion of paternal hatreds which has given origin to so many poems; the love of Romeo and Juliet, the love of Edgar for Lucia; a love inevitable and terrible, which roots itself tenaciously in the rock of impossibility, for the very reason that it is destined to battle with the storms of an ever adverse fate.

We repeat that our youth of thirteen was as yet conscious of scarcely any of these emotions; all he did was to gaze stupidly at the enchanting girl, whose expressive black eyes, chestnut curls, lovely mouth, rose-tinted complexion, and graceful form gave promise to the world of a woman of extraordinary beauty. In addition, the richness, excessive for her age, of her attire; the diamonds that gleamed in her ears and on her throat; the exquisite perfection of her foot-gear, and even the beautiful basket embroidered in colors, in which she carried her work and her books, contributed to dazzle the half-savage boy, brought up in the Sierra and the sacristy, half-hunter, half-acolyte, who had scarcely ever exchanged a word with boys, and still less with girls, accustomed solely to the austere society of his active and energetic father and the uncultured parish priest of Santa María de la Cabeza.

But when Manuel first became, in some degree, aware of his feelings toward her, was when this Eve of twelve succeeded in conquering in the struggle and passed so close to him as almost to brush him with her dress. The girl then gave him a glance of feminine curiosity, mixed with an indescribable sweetness, that left him spellbound and breathless;

which done, she turned resolutely in the direction of her house, with so graceful a movement of precocious and artful coquetry that it would have turned Manuel's head if it had not been already turned with love and terror.

Nor did Soledad's wiles end here in this first interview. Twice at least, in crossing the plaza, she turned her head to look again at the orphan, whose beauty must have seemed to her not less striking now than when she had contemplated it through the shutters of the palace windows; and lastly, before disappearing through the door, which had been opened some time before to admit her, she cast at him a final and a more deliberate glance, with all the formality of a salutation.

Manuel remained crushed and overwhelmed, as it were, under the weight of the strange and confused ideas that assailed him, nor did he raise his eyes from the ground until the clock of the cathedral struck one, reminding him that Don Trinidad would be waiting for him. He then rose with a pang as keen as that which the usurer's wife had felt on leaving the same spot the preceding afternoon, and took the road to the priest's house, staggering as if he were drunk or only half awake,

Samson had met Delilah.

CHAPTER VII.

VARIOUS AND DIVERSE OPINIONS OF DON TRINIDAD.

THE descendant of the Venegases, however, had sufficient strength of will to refrain from returning for a long time to the plaza or its neighborhood, although it is true this resolution did not proceed exclusively from his own consciousness.

Don Trinidad Muley, it was, who, seeing that the youth neither dined nor supped on the day in question, nor slept that night, and that he awoke feverish on the following morning, made due investigation, and, having learned all that had passed, addressed him in these words:

"You are going straight to perdition. I told you it would be so when I remonstrated with you about sitting day after day on that accursed bench; but you wouldn't heed me, and now you see the result. Truly you begin to take pleasure early in the friends of the Serpent. However, I would not blame you for that—for it is not to be supposed that everyone is going to follow my example, in which case the world would soon come to an end; I would not blame you for that, I repeat, if it were not the daughter of the man who treated your father so cruelly that is in question. But it is she who is in

question, and I can understand that your scruples for having taken pleasure in looking at her should have deprived you of sleep and of health, as always happens with those who are in mortal sin. Consequently, in the name of Don Rodrigo Venegas—may whose soul rest in peace! and even in the name of God, I conjure you not to go near that quarter again, unless you wish to lose my affection, the esteem of the world, and, in addition, your own soul.”

Something very similar to this Manuel's own heart had already said to him, and in view of the resolute attitude, accompanied by tears of tenderness, of his beloved protector, he gave his solemn and formal promise to keep away from the Plaza de los Venegas, until Don Trinidad should release him from it.

No less than three years passed, then, before Manuel again saw Soledad.

During this time that strange boy had lived at first shut up almost constantly in the church of Santa María, more devoted than ever to his ancient friendship with the image of the Child of the Ball, to which he gave many offerings and which he frequently kissed, and even talked to softly, as if confiding his sorrows to it. What he did not do, even in his most expansive moods, was to weep. The gift of tears had been denied to this hapless boy.

Having thus reached the age of fourteen and when the vigilant Don Trinidad, who asked him no questions, believed that he had forgotten his child-

ish passion, Manuel suddenly changed his manner of life and began to make long excursions to the Sierra. He would sometimes remain there for a week at a time, and it soon began to be noticed that, although he knew no one in the mountain and always avoided the neighborhood of people, he never carried either provisions or arms.

"How do you manage about food, boy?" said the priest to him one day.

"Father," answered the child, "everything is to be had in the Sierra."

"Yes, I know that there are wild fruits and vegetables there, and good hunting and fowling—but how can you hunt without a gun?"

"With this," responded Manuel, showing the priest a hempen sling, which he carried fastened to his belt, "and with the branches of trees; and with my naked hands; and with my teeth, if necessary."

"You are the very devil, boy!" ended the priest, who, notwithstanding, liked a wild life better than a civilized life, and who, besides, was no coward.

He continued, then, to respect this new caprice of his ward, and even thought it natural that the poor orphan should seek a mother in solitude and an ally in nature, as he had sought a brother in the Child Jesus.

"What can we do about it?" he would say to his housekeeper. "If in that dog's life he learns nothing good, he will learn nothing bad, either; and if he never succeeds in learning Latin we will teach

him a trade, and there is an end of it. St. Joseph was a master carpenter. Why, it is not even known that he was a master."

"That boy is crazy," Polonia would invariably answer.

Manuel's excursions gradually became longer, and he came back from each more taciturn and melancholy than from the last; so that he was now a shocking sight to see, on his return after whole months of absence, tanned by the sun and the rain, his hands and feet scratched from climbing almost inaccessible heights, his flesh torn at times by the teeth and the claws of the wolf, the wild boar, and other wild beasts, and always clad in the skins of his adversaries—the only gala of the little Nimrod, after combats so unequal.

But alas, what were all these ravages compared to those which a deep-rooted sentiment, unsuited to his age, or a new craze, according to Polonia, made in the sick soul of the unhappy boy? What did such toils matter to him who sought in them a remedy or a balm for deeper and more fatal anxieties.

But it must be here confessed that with his involuntary and inextinguishable affection for Soledad it was that the orphan really struggled in those sylvan regions without, however, obtaining the desired victory, as he had struggled with it in vain in the church of Santa María, under the protection of the Child of the Ball. The youth was now past fifteen, he was of Arab blood, and in his fiery and stubborn

imagination the image of the forbidden girl, of the prohibited good, of impossible happiness, shone brighter and more enchanting than ever, while his scrupulous conscience felt a constantly increasing repugnance to this criminal, infamous, sacrilegious affection, so he then styled it, that had come to frustrate so many plans of reparation and of justice, slowly elaborated by the orphan during three years of meditation and silence. He fancied that his father would curse from above this love contrived by the devil in order that the ruin and the death of the noblest of men might remain unavenged, and he made unparalleled efforts to tear from his soul the name of Soledad, to avoid seeing the tender light of her eyes, to avoid hearing the sound of her sweet voice, to keep from longing for the delight of her smile, to kill, in short, the insensate desire of being her friend—her friend always, her dearest friend—which had sprung into being in his proud heart from the very impossibility of attaining it.

We cannot tell where Manuel would have stopped or if he would, in truth, have ended by being covered with hair and walking on four feet like the savage beasts, as the priest's housekeeper prophesied, if the latter had not succeeded in convincing Don Trinidad that the presumptive Nebuchadnezzar was more enamored than ever of the usurer's daughter; that this was the cause of the wretched life he led, and that this unconquerable and unhappy love would soon destroy the little sense the unhappy youth had left, in which case Don Elias, his wife, and

daughter and every living creature who came in his way might begin to tremble.

When Don Trinidad was convinced by these arguments, he set himself to devise some means of reconciling with the eternal principles of morality and justice Manuel's affection for Soledad—an affection which, three years before, had seemed to him so execrable; and after much meditation and many sleepless hours and many consultations with his aforesaid housekeeper, with a very sensible sister of the housekeeper, and even with the usurer's wife, herself (who had occasional meetings with the good spiritual father when Manuel was in the Sierra), he drew up at last his plan of argument, in the form of an Easter Sunday sermon, the principal ideas of which were the following:

First. That Don Elias Perez Sanchez, alias Caiphas, although avaricious and cruel by nature, had always acted within the letter of the law in his transactions with Don Rodrigo Venegas y Carrillo de Albornoz, at no time compelling or inducing the latter to borrow money from him or demanding from him afterward any other interest or profits than those solemnly agreed upon by both parties.

Second. That the having maintained, at his exclusive cost, a body of soldiers during the war with the French was, without question, the greatest glory of Don Rodrigo Venegas, an action which was to be appreciated and esteemed in proportion to the losses it had occasioned him; so that, if Don Elias Perez had consented to forgive him any part of his

debt, as indiscreet mediators had solicited, he would have lessened by such forgiveness the importance of the patriotic services of the good nobleman, diminishing in the same proportion the luster of his name on the pages of history.

Third. That it was not the money-lender himself who had set fire to his house, but, on the contrary, some one of his embarrassed debtors, among whom figured in the front rank Don Rodrigo Venegas, and that, if the latter had lost his life in saving his creditor's valuable papers, he had also freed himself, by so doing, from the ignominious imputation of being an incendiary and a defrauder, an imputation which still hung over the others, and attained, by the way, a new glory, whose merit consisted precisely in the fact that this valorous action appeared as disinterested as it had been spontaneous; a noble character which it would have lost the moment in which, in recompense of it, Don Elias Perez y Sanchez had made any reduction in Don Rodrigo's debt, or any donation to himself or to the poor orphan; for the heroic act would have been converted, in the eyes of the evil-minded, into a bold method of saving money or procuring it for his son—a thing against which the hidalgo would have protested energetically, both in this world and in the next.

Fourth and last. That, as a consequence of these premises, and after a careful consideration of all that had been determined on the subject by the Council of Trent, it might be decided, in order to avoid

greater evils and assuming the conformity of the interested parties, that there was no moral obstacle or canonical impediment to the daughter of Don Elias Perez y Sanchez becoming the friend or even the wife, if matters should go so far, of the son of Don Rodrigo Venegas y Carrillo de Albornoz, whatever might be said by the fickle and cruel multitude, always eager for the troubles and misfortunes of others, as affording them an opportunity of performing, without cost to themselves, the easy part of spectator or mourner.

Satisfied with his discourse, of which it may be said that, of all the discourses he had ever put together in the whole course of his life, it was the one that had cost him most trouble, Don Trinidad summoned the afflicted orphan to an interview on the very day on which the latter completed his sixteenth year; and after a long prayer, in which he commended himself to the Virgin and to St. Antony of Padua, he proceeded to lay before the youth all the above mentioned arguments, in very clear, although not very concise terms, finishing by embracing him with tears, which was his unanswerable argument in extreme exigencies.

Finally, after he had delivered the sermon, which we shall call *official*, the good priest rose from the leather chair which had served him as cathedra, and descending to a plain and commonplace style, in case the youth should have failed to perceive his meaning, he said to him by way of homely corollary:

"So that you see, you foolish fellow, there is

nothing to prevent your having your own way, and being the friend of Soledad and of her family, or that, within a few years, when you are of an age to think of such tricks, you should be man and wife, supposing that that doll should continue to care for you as she seems to do now—according to what her mother has just told me. Why do you look at me with such amazement? Do you suppose that I am not on the watch where your slightest caprices are concerned? Yes, indeed! Señá María Josefa, who is an excellent woman, in spite of everything, suspects that her daughter cares for you, and she would be heartily rejoiced if all those stories about Don Elias' conduct toward your father could be set at rest in course of time, by means of a benediction—which I would pronounce over you with a great deal of pleasure. The thing is that the poor woman, as she is only a simple-minded creature, has her doubts at times as to whether twenty-five per cent. may not be too high a rate of interest, and as to whether what they call compound interest is admissible among Christians. In short, follies! Questions of *ochavos*, that have nothing to do with God, or with the felicity of our souls, either in this world or in the next, and that never mattered as much as a cumin seed to your good father. So, then, make up your mind to be good, to grow fat, to dress like other people, and to commit no more fooleries. Polonia has a new suit, not a very bad one, ready there for you, so that you may to-day celebrate your sixteenth birthday. Now you are a

man! As for Don Elias, although he may at first prove refractory—for he is very hard-headed, and your father and you have been the determining cause of his being regarded with such disfavor in the town and of the man's being obliged to live shut up within four walls like a leper; and it was very wrong of you, and I told you so at the time, for it was a want of respect, to go and sit every afternoon in front of his windows; a thing, which, as Señá María Josefa has told me, used to put him beside himself, and with reason—as for Don Elias, as I say, we will bring him round, among us all, when you are twenty or twenty-five years old. You are only a boy yet! The chief thing is that you should continue to please that silly girl; for she will make her father cry amen to everything she says, as usual—she is a woman, and that is enough! God deliver us! So go wash yourself and put on your new clothes, and don't neglect to come and let me see you in your frippery. Polonia will help you to comb that lion's mane. God be praised, and what trouble it costs to make a man!"

Imagine the emotion which the conclusion of this discourse produced in Manuel. Soledad loved him! Her mother approved of her affection, and looked forward to uniting them at some future day! The priest, the most upright man in the country, saw nothing reprehensible in such a marriage! Finally, he had a new suit of clothes to put on in which he could go at once to the Plaza de los Venegas, to try to see Soledad, after so long a separation. Soledad, who

must be now over fourteen, who must be now almost a woman, and who had considered the boy handsome, when he was assuredly less so than the youth!

In this way must Manuel's egotism and vanity have reasoned in answer to the corollary of Don Trinidad, and we are even almost tempted to say that these flattering considerations, rather than the moral arguments of the body of the sermon, were what convinced Don Rodrigo's son that he had been afflicting himself without any cause, that he might regard all his sorrows as ended, and that all he had to do now was to put on at once his new suit and begin a peaceful campaign for the conquest of Soledad's hand—in five years' time, or much sooner, if it were possible.

The clock was on the stroke of eleven when the youth left his protector's study, and before half-past he was already, resplendent in his new suit, in the silent plaza called by his name; not now seated on the ominous bench which recalled to him so many bitter moments, but walking quietly before the door of the girls' school, in the hope that Soledad might still continue to attend it, and counting the minutes by the thousandth part, that were still wanting to twelve o'clock.

As the beardless lover's pardonable vanity had just told him, the beauty which had made him so famous as a child, had augmented extraordinarily since his entrance on adolescence. Notwithstanding the hardships of his rude life in the Sierra, or rather because of them, he had almost the stature

and the strength of a grown man, and that stamp of vigorous and virile majesty which, eleven years later, so greatly aroused the admiration of those who saw him riding on horseback between the capital and the town. But with all this the natural bloom of his sixteen springs at this time lent the countenance of the youth an enchanting suavity and virginal freshness, heightened rather than obscured as yet by the downy shade of the budding mustache. In short, he was at once a boy and a man, not so mature as that a girl of fourteen and a half years, Soledad, for instance, should think him too grown-up for her, but mature enough for any woman to look at him already with sinful eyes.

The handsome youth, as I said, was walking up and down in front of the door of the girls' school, very proud of his face, as well as of his shining blue cloth suit, his new hat, and the crimson silk handkerchief which Polonia had tied around his neck, fastening it with a pinchback ring set with false stones, which the priest had presented to her on the day he first celebrated mass—for it is to be observed that this housekeeper, before being the housekeeper had been the nurse of the good Don Trinidad, to whom she would still say when they were alone, "See, child"—when the cathedral clock struck twelve, and the door of the establishment and the door of the mansion of the Venegases opened simultaneously, the former to give egress to Soledad and the other pupils, the latter to give egress to the little old man whom we already know.

The other girls drew away from Soledad with a mysterious air, on seeing this youth, whom they undoubtedly recognized, approach her; the servant, who recognized him, also stood motionless beside the palace door, doubtless fearing some catastrophe, and Soledad, who, it is needless to say, had taken in the situation before anyone else, turned crimson and made an effort to continue on her way.

"Listen to me, Señorita," then said the morose Manuel to her, with unaccustomed gentleness, respectfully placing himself in her way. "I have a message to give you for your father."

Soledad stopped and, instantly recovering from her surprise, fixed her large, gentle eyes on those of the son of Don Rodrigo Venegas, without the faintest trace of timidity or fear. The girl, too, whose budding youthful graces reminded the beholder of Shakspeare's *Ophelia*, had grown considerably. She still wore short dresses—wherein her mother acted unwisely, and still more so in continuing to send her to the school, exposing her to the risk of being paid the compliment—a usual one here—by some bold admirer, that she looked more like a teacher than a pupil. We say this because, among various other reasons, nothing could be more attractive and interesting than the poetic countenance of this young girl, whose expression of profound and reserved intelligence already awakened a lively curiosity and an ardent desire to penetrate into the depths of her soul.

Manuel remained spellbound, unable to continue his address, on observing the new charms that adorned the lovely creature to whom he had been spiritually betrothed since childhood, and he cast down his eyes for a moment, as if dazzled by so much beauty.

It was the exact reverse of the famous first salutation of *Faust* to *Marguerite*—she represented temptation and he innocence.

“Soledad,” the half-savage went on, in a voice so gentle and melodious that it would have softened the heart of the most ferocious tyrant, “tell your father from Manuel Venegas that it depends on you, and you alone, whether he and I are to become friends or not. Tell him that I love you better than my life, and that I am ready to forgive him if he will consent to our marriage when we shall be of a suitable age; by which means old accounts will be settled and many troubles avoided. Tell him that I will study and work meantime, so that I may become a useful man. And, finally, that your mother and Don Trinidad Muley will gladly enter into this reconciliation.”

“And I?” the girl might have asked.

But she took very good care not to do so.

Nor, on the other hand, did she make him any answer whatever; only, an observer might have seen, when the orphan declared his love in terms so vehement, and spoke of the conformity of her mother and of the priest, that she cast down her eyes and bit her lips as if to hide her emotion.

When Manuel had ended his short address Soledad made another attempt to continue on her way, but the youth again detained her with exquisite delicacy, and added the following words:

"To-morrow, at this hour, I will wait here for you to learn your father's answer."

Having said which he saluted her very politely, taking off his hat and drawing aside to allow her to pass.

It was now Soledad who stopped—to fix on Manuel a long look of affection and reproach. Then she moved her lips as if about to say something, but quickly changing her mind, she lowered her daring glance with a certain tardy bashfulness; finally, she smiled slightly, as if in mockery of herself, and set off to run toward the palace with more giddiness and thoughtlessness than were consistent with her maidenly dignity.

And it was time, for at this instant a terrible voice was heard thundering behind the door; Señá María Josefa was seen hurrying out with a look of terror, apparently in search of her daughter, and it could be seen that the old collector was making excuses to the invisible person who was shouting behind the door.

Manuel, in spite of the ineffable rapture which the young girl's undefinable glance had caused him, felt his breast throb with anger and was about to run also toward the palace. But he quickly recovered his self-possession and, shrugging his shoulders, walked with majestic slowness in the opposite direc-

tion, without even turning his head to observe what was going on in the plaza, which he left just as the cries ceased and the door was heard to close.

"To-morrow we shall see!" the youth said to himself, as he went on his way, with a serenity inspired by a sense of the justice and strength of his cause.

CHAPTER VIII.

PERIPÉTEIA.

AT eleven o'clock on the following morning Manuel was already at the school door, waiting for the answer he expected from Don Elias, and, to pass away the time until the usurer's daughter should issue from that sanctuary (where commonplace girls and stolid teachers—so do lovers reason—had the joy of seeing her sewing and hearing her recite her lessons, as if she were a mere mortal like themselves), the poor youth walked up and down, keeping as far as possible from the silent building, puzzling his head with a thousand contradictory conjectures as to the meaning of the blush, the glance, the anger, the appeasement, the fear, the smile, and the flight of the daring, yet shy girl, during the scene of the day before.

What he could not doubt was that Soledad loved him, not now only because Don Trinidad had told him so the morning before, on the authority of the usurer's wife, but because his loyal nature had told him so when he received that glance (revealer of sweet and already foreshadowed mysteries), with which the girl, become a woman, had transformed him into a man.

As for Don Elias' answer to his demand, Manuel's

mind was completely at rest in regard to that also.

"What wiser course can the banned Caiphas pursue," thought the youth, overflowing with joy, pride, and confidence, "than to be reconciled with me, to escape my wrath, and to settle accounts amiably with my father's shade, with the public, and with God? Yes, yes! Soledad is mine! My sorrows are at an end! To-morrow I will begin to work and in four or five years I shall be rich enough to marry my adored one!"

By this time it was twelve o'clock, but the usurer's collector had not yet left the palace to go for the pupil. Had she not gone to school to-day, then? The minutes seemed hours to the impatient Venegas, and from this moment he began to doubt the solidity of the fabric of his hopes.

At last, from all the belfries of the town pealed forth the three Ave Marias, and the girls began to issue from the school, first in groups, then one by one; Soledad, only, did not appear. Nor did the servant go for her.

Manuel could contain himself no longer, and, approaching one of the scholars, a little girl of five or six, who had loitered behind the others, and who was at this moment passing by him, he said with affected indifference:

"Tell me, little girl, and Soledad—did she not go to school to-day?"

"No, Señor," answered the mite; "they have taken her away—for being bad."

"Ah, vile old man!" cried Manuel, turning round and shaking his clenched hand in the direction of the great house, as if calling on those walls to fall and bury Don Elias in their ruins.

And he found himself face to face with Don Trinidad Muley, who, a short time before, had interposed himself strategically between his mad ward and the usurer's house.

"You are right! He is a rascal; and for that reason I have come to bring you home with me," said the priest, taking Manuel by the arm.

"Señor Rector," cried the latter with desperation, "why did you not let me die on the day on which they buried my father?"

"What are you saying, boy? That is blasphemy," answered Don Trinidad with a shudder. "Come, let us go away from here. I have something to say to you. The day is fine and we will take a turn in the sunshine on the Camino de las Huertas. There is nobody there at this hour."

Manuel had let his head fall on his breast and was absorbed in profound meditation.

"There, there, come with me," continued the priest. "Don't give yourself up to despair like that. There is a remedy for everything in the world, especially when one has Christian sentiments. I will tell you what course you must take now. Come along then; it is very cold here."

The youth followed his protector, without raising his head, thinking probably more about his own resources and the bold plans he had that day

formed, than about what the priest might have to say to him.

Turning into the Camino de las Huertas, Don Trinidad Muley (who, we forgot to say, was already, at thirty-seven years of age, excessively stout) stood suddenly still, like a ship about to cast anchor, took off his broad-brimmed hat, wiped the perspiration from his forehead with a large handkerchief, took two or three deep breaths, and spoke thus:

"Well, then, why beat about the bush? You must forget Soledad. Her father hates you with his whole soul, and will never give her to you. 'Never mention his name to me again! I would rather see you dead!' is what he said to her yesterday in answer to your sensible message. And he sent immediately to the school for the chair and other articles belonging to the girl, sending word to the teacher 'that Soledad was now too old to learn fooleries.' All this Señá María Josefa told me just now, with tears in her eyes, in a private interview which she requested from me an hour ago, and which we had at the house of another priest. The poor woman is a saint. So make up your mind to it. You must give me your word of honor, you must swear to me never again to think of Soledad."

Manuel listened with his eyes cast down, and apparently tranquil; and, when the priest had ended, he said to him slowly and distinctly:

"And tell me, what answer did Soledad make her father?"

"There's a way to get out of it! Nothing! What answer should she give him?"

"But—did she give any sign of grief? Did she cry?"

"Soledad is like you—Soledad does not cry!"

"And how do you know that she did not cry on this occasion?"

"Why! Because I asked her mother that, also. Do you suppose that because I wear the garb of a priest I don't understand those matters?"

Manuel went on with his questions.

"And what does Señá María Josefa say? Does she still think that her daughter cares for me? Does she suppose that she will submit to the will of her father?"

"See, child!" responded the priest sharply, "we have not come here to talk of Soledad, but of you. You mustn't ask idle questions."

"So that you won't tell me her mother's opinion?" exclaimed the youth in an offended tone.

"No, indeed! By no means!"

"Very well! It can't be helped, then. You are my second father—and I must only have patience. I will see how I can manage matters myself."

"Bad, bad, Manuel! You don't care for me. Now you begin with threats! That wicked pride will one day be your destruction!"

"You are mistaken, Señor. I love you like a father; but that does not prevent me loving Soledad, too, with all my soul."

"Well, you must not love her, even if you were

to die for it. You must forget her altogether. I command you to do so!"

"That would be impossible, Don Trinidad, impossible!" answered Manuel, with a calmness and sweetness which gave his words a greater force than if he had uttered them in the ardor of passion. "To advise me to give up Soledad is to ask me for my life's blood, and even if I were to shed it, and new blood were to take its place, that too would be hers, only by passing through my heart. Father, my heart belongs to Soledad, as the stone belongs to the ground; no matter from what height or from what distance it be thrown it will always arrive there. I have spent three cruel years in the Sierra, struggling to tear from my heart this affection, whose roots run through my whole body and my whole soul. I have exposed it on those heights to the fury of the tempest, trying to drive it from my heart, and the very struggle to uproot it only strengthened it the more. Tell me now what is left for me to do? To die? To kill myself? I will not do that, because that would be to leave Soledad!"

"You are the very devil, boy!" answered the priest. "You talk like those prohibited books that they call novels, none of which, I am happy to say, have yet fallen into your hands. And the worst of the matter is, that I don't know what answer to give you. Tell me your plans, then, for of course you have some plan."

"I?" replied Manuel with fanatic calmness. "I

don't know what may happen in the future, nor where I may have to strike, to break this chain that holds me bound. All that I am certain of is that Soledad will be mine!"

"But what if she does not care for you?"

"Did her mother tell you that?"

"There you are again! Her mother did not tell me that, but the exact opposite. The poor woman still thinks that her daughter would be rejoiced if the old man should be reconciled with you. But (this is merely a supposition) if the girl should forget you——"

"She will not forget me, father."

"Well, but what if Don Elias should resolve, the day you least expect it, to marry her to someone else?"

"That cannot happen, either."

"And why not? Suppose that some rich man were to ask her in marriage?"

"No one will ask her in marriage; I will take good care to prevent that."

"Manuel!"

"Señor Rector!"

"Your coolness and your confidence terrify me!"

"And with reason. There are times when I too am afraid of myself!"

"What do you intend to do?"

"God only knows! Soledad belongs to me, and I will try to defend her. That is all I can tell you."

"But I cannot consent. I will never consent to your allowing yourself to be carried away by that

Satanic pride which you are beginning to show. Bear that in mind from this day forth. I am a Christian; I am a priest. I like brave men, but not passionate men; and therefore——”

“I understand! I understand! You will turn me out of your house. That is natural and I will bear it with resignation.”

“Go to the devil! Who is talking of such a thing? What I say to you is that I will not consent to your doing anything which is contrary to the law of God. Nor do I think you would be capable of breaking that law. But if you should do so, in spite of the pains I have taken to teach it to you, I should die of rage because you are not my son (for in that case I should cleave you in twain), and of shame at having brought up such a monster, I might almost say, in my bosom!”

“Tranquilize yourself, dear father,” answered Manuel with that gravity which he owed, not to his years, but to the sadness of his life. “I want nothing but simple justice. Justice for all! I will defend my rights and make them respected by everybody. I will protect the poor girl’s liberty, and prevent her father from sacrificing her, as he has sacrificed me, and by these simple means—do not doubt it—Soledad will be my wife.”

“You know what you are about—and I will not lose sight of you. The truth is there is no need to take any hasty step. You have plenty of time before you. You yourself, although you suddenly passed out of your childhood six years ago, when

your father died, and you became a didapper, are not old enough yet to think of marriage. And as for the girl, why, she is only fourteen! You see, a mere child! The devil take you both!—Heavens! how hungry I am! It must be after one.—And this, my dear boy, without counting that Don Elias is over sixty and may die at any moment. Sixty-five, according to my calculations! And there's many a father has first refused his consent and afterward granted it. God is great and merciful; he tightens the cord, but he does not strangle. And—so long as one's conscience is at rest.—The deuce! One, by the cathedral clock! Come, come; let us hurry; to-day we have vermicelli soup, and Polonia will be fuming by this time. Don't you hear me, child? What are you thinking about? Am I going to have to ask you for the embrace of peace? Well, then, I ask it! Are you satisfied?"

Manuel embraced, in so far as it was possible for him to do so, the respectable bulk of Don Trinidad Muley, without answering a single word; but on his noble and beautiful forehead could be read rash resolves.

CHAPTER IX.

STRATEGIC OPERATIONS.

FROM this melancholy day until that of the much-talked-of adventure which obliged Manuel to leave the town (not to return to it for the space of eight years, as we have already related in the First Book of the present history), our hero carried out with marvelous constancy of purpose the vast plan which he had conceived in the Camino de las Huertas, and the details of which he did not think it opportune to explain to the good priest of Santa Maria, a plan daring and intricate in the extreme (as was afterward seen), which embraced three parallel lines of conduct; one toward himself, another toward the public, and another toward Don Elias and Soledad.

With respect to himself, he had resolved to work and to earn money, not only that he might cease to be a burden on his protector, but also in order to accumulate a modest competence to offer at some future day to his adored one, assured that she would accept it joyfully, leaving Don Elias and his ill-gotten millions without a moment's hesitation for the pure joys of love and virtue, the only solid foundation of happiness according to this beardless successor of Don Quixote.

The Sierra, a treasure which at that time belonged

to no one, and which, consequently, as being common property, all were alike free to enjoy, offered at this time also a broad field for the activity and the prodigious powers of the orphan. But not now to wander about in it at will, braving useless dangers, or to enjoy in it at his ease the free life of nature, but to draw from it abundant profit, by means of the providential lessons which his father had given him, and of the knowledge which he himself had acquired of the secrets and the riches of that marvelous mountain, which, in another work, we have called "The Mother of Andalusia."

Industries forgotten in that region since the expulsion of the Moors, or neglected since the death of Charles III., and not a few sources of profit which until recently have seemed worthy of no one's attention, served as subjects for the wonderful inventive genius and the Titanic laboriousness of Manuel, who, without the assistance of anyone—not wishing to divulge secrets of which he was the sole possessor—was at once herbalist, hunter of fur-bearing animals, dealer in rare and precious woods, collector of rare insects, quarrier of jasper and serpentine, and gold washer.

These last three employments, especially, brought him rich profits. Gold is found in abundance among the sands of a river having its rise in these heights and, if this source of wealth has not yet sufficed to convert the region into a species of Peru, it is because the operation of gathering and washing the said sands is so long and laborious that the most

industrious man, of ordinary capacity, working twelve hours a day, can collect scarcely gold enough to pay for his food. And as for the jasper and the serpentine, although they are to be found near the surface of the ground in the high ravines surrounded by eternal snows, their transportation is so difficult and dangerous that only on rare occasions—as for the decoration of some sumptuous church—had the arduous undertaking of utilizing them hitherto been attempted. But what were these difficulties to a man of Manuel's extraordinary resources? When were so much natural intelligence, so much physical strength, so much agility, and such unwearying perseverance ever before united in one person? Who knew the Sierra as he did? Who was so accustomed to its hardships, so familiar with its labyrinthine paths, so practiced in climbing its heights and descending its precipices? He turned, then, streams aside from their course, constructed dams and rafts, condensed, by decantation, the flakes and shreds of gold, as is done at the present day in California,* and by these means he sometimes collected in a week more than fifteen drams of the precious metal. And in order to roll the heavy blocks of jasper and serpentine to the foot of the mountain, without breaking them, he covered them with long grass and closely woven branches, and slid them, at the risk of his life, along the channels made by the melting snows (without observing how far these were practicable) precipitating himself after each of

* 1878.

those artificial glaciers, when the huge mass bounded from' rock to rock, from the torrent's having been converted into a waterfall.

Finally, to pursue the other industries we have mentioned, to gather precious medicinal herbs or to catch rare animals of hyperborean species, whose skins are purchased at exorbitant prices, to enrich himself with all the productions of that privileged region (where, at different altitudes the four seasons reign simultaneously, and where white moss and indigo, the fir and the sugar cane, wormwood, and the coffee tree, the chestnut, and the anona grow equally well), he was obliged also to endure incredible hardships—to spend whole nights amid the eternal snows, to descend to awe-inspiring lakes hitherto unvisited by man, to scale unexplored peaks, to be a real Hercules.

Having collected the harvest of the four first days of the week, Manuel would go on Fridays to some little port on the neighboring coast, and there sell such articles as he had been able to transport by himself, and contract for the transportation of the woods, the serpentine and the jasper which he had left together in a comparatively low and accessible region, so that on the Saturday he was back in his native town, carrying in his pocket a good handful of coin, which he divided into three equal portions—one for Polonia to spend in providing him with everything necessary to enable him to dress richly, though always in the style of the people, another which he gave to Don Trinidad to maintain and

extend the worship of the image of the Child of the Ball; and the third, which the youth kept himself, to go toward forming his personal treasure, or rather, his second treasure, for the worthy priest always quietly put away entire, as a deposit, the sums which he received from Manuel, without for that reason neglecting to extend, at his own cost, the worship of the Infant Jesus, "for the good of his ward's soul."

On his return to the town, where he remained until the following Monday morning, he would dress himself elegantly and devote himself to the execution of that part of his plan which had reference to the public. This was limited to what he humorously called "doing justice," and had for its object to win, by degrees, in addition to the pity and the affection which his fellow-citizens had always bestowed upon him, their respect, their obedience, their fear (in the salutary sense of the word), until he should come to be, as he very soon did, the master, the king, the dictator of the town.

Justice, indeed, was the only spring which the son of Don Rodrigo Venegas set in motion to attain this high magistracy, *de facto*. That is to say, that for the space of three years he devoted the aforesaid two days of the week to dethroning bravos; restraining tyrants; defending the weak against the strong, when right was on the side of weakness; upholding the authority of the law in those cases which did not come within the jurisdiction of the persons appointed to administer it; and to correct-

ing every abuse, every indignity, every act of oppression which aroused the indignation of honest men. He sought out in their own haunts, and in the midst of their court, of their vassals, the most noted hectors and bullies of the town and reproved them for their outrages and excesses, saying that he was resolved not to permit them to go on. It was observed that, in proceeding thus, he went, as was his custom, unarmed, and one of the ruffians whom he thus upbraided, taking advantage of this, attacked him, dagger in hand. But what avails a dagger to him who has the lion upon him, and what matters to the lion a piece of iron in the hand of a man? Quick as a flash Manuel fell upon his audacious assailant, throwing him to the ground by the sole impetus of his sudden assault, caught the murderous arm in his iron grip, and snapped it in two as if it were a reed. Then he turned against the others; but they were now all his vassals and they cheered and applauded him, while they overwhelmed the fallen bully with jeers and insults.

This was almost the only proof of physical superiority which the intrepid youth was obliged to give in order to reduce to submission all the bullies of the town. Wherever there was a quarrel or a disturbance, the moment he made his appearance he became the judge and arbiter of the conflict. A glance from his eye, a word from his lips, sufficed to send away the timid tranquilized and the brave full of terror. And as, besides, he often settled disputes and repaired injuries at his own cost; as he almost

equaled Don Trinidad Muley in the abnegation with which he succored the needy and shared their dangers and sorrows; as he had already saved more than one person's life, fighting now against fire, now against an epidemic, now against an inundation, it followed that his superiority, far from humiliating, was so acceptable and appeared so just, that vassalage became adoration and reverence.

Many causes, of widely differing natures, contributed also to this, as was natural. The nobility of his birth, his heroic father's memory, his identification with the Child of the Ball, his laconic speech and his precocious austerity, his grave courtesy toward the good, his beauty, his elegance, the prestige lent him by a protector so popular as Don Trinidad Muley, his freedom from every vice, the very idea that Soledad loved him, and, finally, even the presentiment that he would one day punish Caiphas, avenging the many victims of his insatiable thirst for gold, contributed to exalt him in the eyes of the populace, and to convert him into one of those heroes who figure, after their death, in romances and tales.

And in truth the half-savage youth had much that was romantic and great, even in the moral and intellectual order. The heroic soul which he had inherited from his father, although thrown upon itself, for want of literary culture, had been educated by grief, by solitude, by the thoughtful study of nature and by the ardent devotion which was the result of the species of ecstasy in which he had

spent three consecutive years. Always meditating in silence in those two temples, the church and the mountain, now abandoning himself to the grief of his orphaned state, now to his hatred of the oppressor of his house, now to his love for Soledad, now to the conflict between these three sentiments, he had attained to a profound knowledge of his spiritual powers; for which reason it was not strange that, although so young, he should have acquired authority over the minds of others. It was with him as with Jacob, after he had wrestled with the angel.

Finally, even in the physical order, Manuel had the glory, at the age of nineteen, of undertaking and carrying to a successful termination a gigantic enterprise, which contributed more than any of his previous ones to make him famous and to idealize him in the superstitious minds of the multitude. It happened (and with this anecdote, we will close for the present the interminable relation of the exploits of the son of Don Rodrigo Venegas) that in the severe winter of 1831-32 an enormous bear, either besieged by hunger or fleeing from the copious snows which covered the whole of the other mountains of the Peninsula, made its way to the sheltered ravines of the southern slope of the Sierra. The beast had committed dreadful havoc among the flocks, and even among the people, descending to the plain to attack travelers when it could not find its prey in the sheep-folds, and proclamations, offering a high price for its skin, were issued by all the

town councils of the district, but every party that had set out in chase of it had returned to their homes in terror or very well contented—not to have been chased by it. When things were in this condition, and when no one would venture outside the villages, not now in search of the bear, but even on the most urgent business, the beast was found one morning, stabbed to death, in the middle of the town square.

There could be no doubt, judging by the traces along the whole road, that the body had been dragged to the town from the Sierra; but no one knew who the author of the exploit was, and no one presented himself to claim the offered reward.

“Manuel Venegas it was! Only he has the pluck for those things!” cried the popular voice, however.

And indeed it was soon known that the so-called Child of the Ball had arrived the night before, covered with blood, at Don Trinidad Muley’s house, and that Luis, the barber, was treating him for three large wounds which he had on the shoulders and back.

It was with the utmost difficulty that the young man was induced to confess that he had killed the bear, and to describe the desperate conflict which he had sustained with it, with only his hands for weapons (all for the whim he had, at the time, of not carrying firearms, which he characterized as treacherous); but it was impossible to persuade him to accept the before-mentioned reward.

“I will present it,” said Manuel, “to Our Lady of

Solitude, to whom I commended my life and my soul at the moment of greatest danger. Buy her a new mantle and let a splendid festival be given in her honor." The enthusiasm which these acts aroused among the public may easily be imagined. The entire town visited the wounded youth during the five weeks which elapsed before his wounds were healed, nor did they fail to bring into the conversation, on every visit, the glorious death of Don Rodrigo Venegas, whose heroic example was so worthily followed by his extraordinary son. And when the latter appeared in the street and bent his steps toward the church of San Antonio, to return thanks to the Virgin of Solitude, it was not salutations, but cheers and acclamations that he received from all the townspeople.

And Caiphas and his daughter—what did they say to all this? What were the hatred and the fears of the one, and the love and the hopes of the other, in view of the fabulous growth of that figure which concerned them more nearly than anyone else? Nothing was known on this subject, for neither the father nor the daughter was inclined to be communicative, nor had Señá María Josefa again made her appearance in Don Trinidad's house. For the present, then, we will merely describe the course of conduct pursued by Manuel toward them (third part of the plan which our lover was carrying out in so lofty a manner).

In the course of the three years which this period of his life lasted, Manuel saw Soledad for an hour

every Sunday, it being sufficient for this to station himself in front of her house at daybreak and wait there until she came out with her mother to go to mass. The latter was very religious, and incapable, therefore, of allowing her daughter to neglect to comply with the precepts of the church, so that there was no choice but to brave all the consequences of this new siege of the youth, no matter what opposition the besieged Don Elias might have wished to make to so dangerous a sally from the fortress. There is no domestic tyrant powerful enough to prevent his wife and daughter from complying with the religious duties imposed upon them by their conscience, and, besides, the usurer, although he did not practice his religion (because of his terror of putting his foot in the street), was a Catholic—Roman and Apostolic—or wished to appear so.

Finally, at that time it did not enter into Manuel's plans to persecute Don Elias in any way, nor to take any direct steps with reference to Soledad. He confined himself, then, to waiting for her, to seeing her pass, following her at a distance, stationing himself in the church, so that he might watch her at his ease, waiting for her afterward at the door and serving her as escort back to the palace, until he had seen her enter it. This was all he did, but this, combined with the imposing conduct he observed with respect to the public, sufficed for his daring purpose—which was to form a void around the usurer's daughter, mark her for his own, pro-

claim her his, prevent any suitor from approaching her, put between her and the world the dreaded power of his heart and his arm.

The mother and daughter would pass by him, gravely and sadly, never looking at him (for such must have been their instructions), but always seeing him. Women never fail to see what it concerns them to see. Nor did Manuel grieve because they neither looked at him nor saluted him; his loyal soul told him that their sadness was a species of greeting; he imagined the terrible orders they must have received from the usurer, whom he separated from them in his mind, and far from bearing them ill-will, he pitied them profoundly. He was so certain of their affection and sympathy! Add to this that Manuel fancied he had at times surprised Soledad looking at him furtively.

The charming girl had continued to grow in grace and beauty, and at the end of these three years she was a woman so exquisite and lovely, with an air so poetic and mysterious, a form so perfect, so slender, and so seductive, with such melancholy black eyes, shaded by such long and silky lashes, with so interesting a pallor, with hands so white and beautiful, so stately in her bearing and so serious in her rich attire, that the popular imagination began to invent laudatory titles and epithets for her, and, after calling her the Silver Damsel, the Jewish Pearl, the Stolen Pearl, the Lump of Sugar, and other names of the kind, gave her the name of La Dolorosa, which was the one that best suited her, and that

which finally adhered to her, as we have seen elsewhere. She looked, indeed, like an image of the Virgin, only that her sorrow did not reach affliction and had more of haughtiness than sweetness. But the black gown, the white head-dress, and the ornaments of gold and precious stones with which she was always laden, contributed, on the other hand, to justify that strange name.

Let us add that Manuel's popularity was reflected on her who was the mistress of his heart, and that everyone had for her as much respect and good-will as they had hatred and ill-will for her father—if they still cherished those feelings toward him. The multitude is at times so ingenious in compromising with its own conscience regarding its weaknesses and idolatries! Millions, however ill-gotten, will at last fascinate it and win from it its homage, when it is convinced that there is no possibility of depriving their possessor of them. Hence lapses officious public judgment, or, let us say, public indignation, against ill-gotten wealth long enjoyed, as some official or legal judgments, however just, lapse after a certain number of years. "To possess," says an axiom in law, "is one form of acquiring." And it must be borne in mind that Don Elias had now enjoyed for nine years the quiet and undisturbed possession of the fortune of the Venegases, and had had double and triple the time necessary to become the owner of other millions. The day must be near, then, when public opinion would pardon him, and meantime its anathema did not weigh on the inno-

cent girl, in whom the indemnity of the second possessor was, it would seem, acknowledged; as it had never weighed on Señá María Josefa, in whom the prudent populace cheerfully recognized another title to its consideration, in order to have a conscientious excuse for keeping up relations with the millionaire's family—the title of an excellent and compassionate woman whom her husband's cruelties distressed greatly—a thing which was indeed true. In short, whether for these reasons or through deference to the worthy Manuel, or because of her own grace and beauty, or for all those causes together, Soledad enjoyed the esteem, the affection, and the sympathy of all the neighborhood, with the exception of some females of her own rank and age, who envied her, in particular, the romantic love of Don Rodrigo Venegas's gallant son, especially when he began to possess money, to wear costly raiment, and had bought a horse.

Our youthful hero did not cease to gaze at the lovely girl with an ingenuousness and a boldness suited rather to a savage than a civilized state of society, from the moment in which he saw her issue from the ancient mansion to that in which he saw her re-enter it, and more especially during the mass, as if he believed that his devotion to the so-called Dolorosa exempted him from attending to the bloodless sacrifice. Soledad, on the contrary, did not remove her eyes from the altar, kneeling from the beginning to the end of the ceremony, praying without interruption, if one might judge by the

slight movement of her seraphic lips and the many beads of the rosary which she slipped through her fingers. But where, meanwhile, was her spirit? His heart told the enamored youth that that angel was asking from Heaven the triumph of their mutual affection—but we have not sufficient evidence either to deny or to affirm any such thing, nor even to answer for the fact that the young girl prayed at all. Are there not persons endowed with the special faculty of not seeing what they are looking at? Who can say, then, that Soledad was not one of those persons, and that, while her eyes were apparently fixed on the altar, they were not contemplating the graceful figure of Manuel Venegas?

We repeat that we think everything possible. At any rate the person most interested (a man of very sure instincts) always left the church wild with happiness and cherishing smiling hopes.

Let us then at once proceed with our story, or in other words, let us give an account of the catastrophe and the circumstances which led to it that brought this period of our hero's life to a close.

CHAPTER X.

THE SUMMONS.

WHEN the thoughtful and prudent Don Elias arrived at the conviction that Soledad, the only person whom he had ever loved or benefited disinterestedly, could serve him as a shield and defense against the anger of Manuel, and against the indignation and the jeers of the people (for such is always, the moralists have observed on this point, the fruit of good conduct), when he was convinced, as I have said, of the love and respect entertained for her by Venegas, and of the admiration and esteem entertained for her by the public, he made a complete change in his habits and his manner of life.

The old man commenced by venturing to go to mass, a thing which he had for a long time desired to do, in order to free himself from the ill-sounding epithets of Jew, heretic, and other similar nicknames bestowed on him by the public; then he went so far as to take walks into the country, as was required by his health, in the opinion of the family physician; and ended, finally, by appearing on the promenade and joining in the popular festivals like, or very nearly like, any other Christian. To do all this (it is proper to observe), he availed himself of the time during which Manuel was suffering from the wounds received in his struggle with the bear.

It is to be observed also, that in these excursions he was always accompanied by Soledad, never by Señá María Josefa, for whom the millionaire continued to show as much dislike and contempt as he showed idolatrous affection for the daughter whom she had given him. "There are some men like that, who can never be quite honest, even where their most sacred affections are concerned," the severe sister of Don Trinidad Muley's housekeeper would exclaim on this point. They attended mass at the cathedral, as being a more respectable or a more respected temple than any other. For their promenades the usurer had had a very old coach or carriage of the Venegases, which he had found in the woodyard of the ancient palace, repaired and upholstered. And when there were processions or fireworks to be seen there was never wanting a window of some tardy debtor, whose domicile had a private door opening on some solitary lane through which to enter with due caution.

The appearance of Don Elias and Soledad on the balcony of the window that looked out upon the plaza where the preparations for the festival were going on, and which was swarming with people, sudden and unexpected as it was, created, then, a profound sensation. "La Dolorosa!" "La Dolorosa!" was heard on all sides. "How beautiful she looks! How elegantly dressed she is! What pearls she wears! She has a fortune on her back!" And it was only after some time that they observed Don Elias (it was not now the fashion to call him

Caiphas), whom some thought very aged-looking, others very well preserved, many better dressed and less antipathetic than in 1823, and all deserving of pardon and forgetfulness of past offenses, after so many years of seclusion. "If he has transgressed," the attitude of the chorus seemed to say, "he has well expiated his crime. Let us at least accord him the indulgent reception which is never refused to those who have fulfilled their sentence. And, after all, Don Rodrigo was a spendthrift, who would, in any case, have died in the hospital, and as for the Child of the Ball, you see that he was not born, either, to be Minister of Finance. He has no sooner saved a little money than he buys a horse! The rich are born, the poor are made!"

The first time our hero saw the father of his beloved, clearly and distinctly, was on the day on which he went to give thanks to the Virgin of Solitude, on his restoration to health. To escape the demonstrations of enthusiasm with which he was overwhelmed, whenever he set foot in the streets, and the visits which continued to pour in upon him, in the house, he had taken a walk to a farmhouse in the vicinity of the town, which had belonged to his father, and where there was a spring possessing very strengthening properties, and there he saw, standing alone beside the spring, plunged in profound meditation, an old man of tall stature, whose grave and austere countenance, and cold and penetrating glance, he remembered to have seen years before, behind a window pane in the antique dwelling of the Venegases.

"Soledad's father!" the young man said to himself, drawing back a step.

Don Elias raised his eyes at the same moment. He saw and recognized Manuel, and as he did so he turned yellower than wax; but he made no gesture which might show the nature of this emotion.

Manuel put forward again the foot he had drawn back, and proceeded to measure the old man from head to foot, with that free, bold glance which was habitual to him, and which could be compared only to that of the bull who, discovering an intruder in his field, hesitates whether to rush upon him or to accord him pardon.

The haughty old man remained motionless, looking apparently in another direction, but without losing sight of the angry youth, whose eyes now began to flash fire.

At this critical juncture, an entrancingly sweet, girlish voice came from the olive plantation, crying: "Papa, where have you hidden yourself?"

"She!" thought Manuel, trembling like a leaf and again retreating, not one step only this time, but several, although slowly and reluctantly.

The old man neither answered his daughter nor moved from his post. But when he saw the famous Child of the Ball disappear, still walking backward, he gave an enigmatic smile and turned his steps toward the spot whence had proceeded the magical voice of the woman who was queen and mistress of those two hostile souls.

Manuel, meantime, had stationed himself on the

road, in order to see the young girl pass as she was returning to the town, and perhaps, too, to follow her, as usual, let it displease the old man or not, but the poor fellow had not reckoned with the rejuvenated carriage of his ancestors, which drove rapidly by him, raising a cloud of dust that prevented him from catching even a glimpse of the sweet object of his thoughts.

No one doubted afterward but that this incident, so insignificant in appearance, but in reality so significant, had had great part in causing Don Elias and young Venegas to commit, a few weeks later, the grave imprudences which still further widened the gulf between them. And this was because, since that meeting, in which there was neither collision nor offense of any kind, they had ceased to regard each other as being as hostile and as formidable, the one for the other, as they in reality continued to be; both became accustomed to seeing each other in the street or in the cathedral, without being greatly startled, and, as a consequence, they came into direct collision on the day least expected, and in the worst circumstances which Satan could have devised to make them utterly irreconcilable.

The occasion was this:

In the April of this same year, when Manuel was nineteen, Soledad seventeen and a half, Señá María Josefa fifty-six, Don Trinidad forty, his housekeeper fifty-nine, and the sister of the housekeeper sixty-three, La Dolorosa at last succeeded in persuading her now reanimated father to take her to

see the functions which the very ancient Brotherhood of the Child of the Ball celebrated at that time in the parish of Santa María de la Cabeza.

These functions consisted—and they still consist—in a mass, with the exposition of the Holy Sacrament, a sermon, and a general communion, on Sunday morning; a solemn procession through the suburb on the same afternoon, and a raffle ball on the afternoon of the following day; in all of which, three years before, the son of Don Rodrigo Venegas had played an important part, as a member of the Brotherhood and a particular friend, and twice the namesake of the Infant Jesus. It was a matter of general surprise, then, on this occasion, that Manuel, although he was in the town and never lost an opportunity of seeing La Dolorosa, should assist neither at the mass nor the procession, where he could have admired, like everybody else, the beauty, the costly attire, and the grace of the money lender's daughter, who, on this day, wore for the first time two dresses which had been made for her at the capital by the court dressmaker, both equally rich, elegant, and beautiful.

Thus matters stood on the day of the raffle, or of the dance of the raffle, which was held at that time, as it is now, in the environs of the town, in a quarter inhabited by the poorest part of the population, who live in caves hollowed out of the compact clay of a semi-circular range of hills. Here the mothers of the maids who serve in the houses in the body of the town, place before their respective hovels all the

chairs they possess, to be occupied by the members of the families with whom their daughters are at service, previously invited to the festival, at which the ladies appreciate highly a good seat where they may at once enjoy the fresh air, display their finery, and see the raffle and the dance, even the proudest braving willingly the risk of being obliged to dance a little, as if they were humble country girls.

For it is to be observed (and we hasten to make the statement, promising neither to add to nor take from the truth regarding customs that are still prevalent in this and other districts of the Spanish Peninsula), that, in these dances, held in front of a portable altar on which is to be seen the effigy of the Saint, Virgin, or Lord in whose honor the festival is celebrated, the public have the amplest power to raffle, or put up to auction, the demand that such or such a woman shall or shall not dance with such or such a man, or that such or such a man shall not embrace, or shall embrace a second time, the woman with whom he has just danced—it being understood that the dance now and in times past performed at these balls is the fandango pure and simple, a dance which terminates, obligatorily, as you are no doubt already aware, with the indispensable embrace of each couple. Whoever does not desire that what someone else desires, and is willing to pay for, shall take place, must give a larger sum of money to the needy saint, and in this way large sums are collected for the worship of the venerated image. Twenty-five ducats it once cost a certain

Corregidor to prevent his wife from dancing with the town-crier.

The dance and the raffle had already begun on the afternoon we have mentioned, with all the more merriment and animation as *La Dolorosa* now assisted, for the first time, at the festival, and occupied a prominent seat in front of the cave in which the steward of the Brotherhood and the parish priest, Don Trinidad Muley, had pitched the presidential tent; that is to say, had placed the altar of the Child of the Ball. Perhaps, too, the general enjoyment was increased by the fact of the absence from this service of the dreaded personage called by the same name, whom almost everyone had now given up expecting, not without a certain secret sense of relief in the case of some, who, in his absence would thus be more free to gaze at, and even to pay an occasional compliment to the beautiful daughter of the millionaire, and to talk with the latter on the private and, unfortunately, present concerns of a wretched world in which the want of money too often obliges men to hide from themselves, though but for a few hours, only to be compelled to keep up a quarrel forever after with their own consciences, as with an unforgiving wife, who finds that she has been deceived. Certain it is that Don Elias was there, as gay as everybody else, treated with respect and attention by those around him, with some of whom he occasionally exchanged a few words, and even laughed, contrary to his custom—as if the poor old man's soul was cheered by this

late ray of reflected popularity which gilded the sunset of his life, in the winter precursor of death. How much, how much did he not owe to his darling child! And with what rapture he turned to gaze at her, whispering to her every moment: "What are you looking at? Do you admire those jewels? Do you fancy that dress? Do you wish me to buy you one like it?"

Soon the vague light of happiness that illumined the old man's brow was clouded, never to shine again.

Cries of, "Manuel Venegas is coming! There is the Child of the Ball!" could be heard among the crowd.

And a lugubrious presentiment darkened the souls of some, while others experienced a certain gratuitous and unenviable complacency.

Manuel was, indeed, approaching from the direction of the town; his graceful and richly attired form was not to be confounded with any other, and he soon penetrated into the midst of the crowd with a bearing neither proud nor humble, apparently unconscious of the sensations he produced, and responding with a slight nod or a laconic phrase to the numerous salutations he received.

Thus he advanced to the altar of the Child of the Ball, whose feet he kissed, after which he approached Don Trinidad Muley and kissed his hand, and then he fixed his eyes on the face of Soledad with his usual innocent and frank fearlessness, as if he were looking at what belonged to him; as he might have

looked had the young girl been his wife, his sister, or his daughter.

Don Elias had turned yellow, but he did not so much as move an eyelash, and he continued his conversation with a rustic who for some minutes past had been talking to him, hat in hand, and who—be it said without offense—covered himself hastily when he saw Manuel Venegas approaching.

Soledad, on whom all eyes were turned, remained still more impassive than the old man, for she did not even change color; and, so that her glance might not encounter that of the imprudent youth, or of anyone among the curious crowd, she fixed her gaze on the image of the Infant Jesus, not indeed feigning a sudden devotion, but as if abstractedly.

An observer, familiar with the world, and acquainted with the workings of the human heart, would have found something terrible in the depth of negation and the fierce strength of will which must have underlain the immobility of the dissimulation that kept every sign of emotion out of the heavenly girl's eyes, when Tragedy already her scepter of serpents extended over her father's head and her own. But Manuel loved her thus, he loved her as she was; he had the intuition, the faith, the certainty that that inscrutable soul was his, and, as for the chorus, always more artistic than really compassionate, it contented itself with admiring the enchanting, the angelic attitude of the imperturbable Dolorosa, without looking any deeper.

At this juncture, and when the public was already beginning to grow impatient at seeing no signs of a coming conflict at which to be alarmed, Manuel turned quietly to the committee who presided over the raffle, and in a clear, firm voice, which stirred every heart, he said, pointing to Soledad:

"A hundred reals to dance with that lady!"

Soledad feigned not to have heard him; but Don Elias rose to his feet, crimson with anger, and answered immediately:

"A thousand reals that he shall not dance with her!"

A loud murmur, like thunder heralding an approaching storm, spread around the amphitheater, and the more distant of the spectators drew nearer, in order to witness the terrible auction that had thus begun.

Soledad removed her gaze from the Child Jesus and, lowering her eyes, pulled her father by the coat, as if to urge him to sit down and abandon the contest.

Manuel meantime had answered:

"A hundred dollars to dance with her!"

And he untied his sash and took from one end of it a handful of gold coins.

The public uttered a roar of applause.

The miser hesitated for an instant. The spectators noticed this, and began to exchange glances and malicious smiles with one another.

"A hundred and ten that he shall not dance with her!" at last exclaimed poor Don Elias.

"Higher, Manuel! I will help you!" several half-tipsy young men exclaimed at the same moment.

"Higher, boy, and count upon my pay for this month!" said a gray-haired retired captain. "I fought at your father's side at Talavera."

Manuel smiled calmly and, taking another handful of gold, responded:

"Five hundred dollars that she dance with me!"

"Good! good!" cried almost everyone in the assemblage.

And some even clapped their hands and cheered the Child of the Ball.

Soledad, who had succeeded, by dint of tugs (the more efficacious in proportion as Manuel's bids went higher), in inducing her father to resume his seat, stood up at hearing this last offer and began to tie the ends of her mantilla behind her, as if she had made up her mind to dance.

The Riojan wished to stop her, but a thousand voices arose simultaneously, calling in a variety of tones:

"That is to be prevented with money!"

"The Brotherhood must not be the losers!"

"The Infant Jesus must not lose the ten thousand reals that have been offered to him!"

"Either you outbid him or La Dolorosa dances with Manuel Venegas!"

"Take out your millions, Don Elias! For what occasion are you keeping them?"

"Liberality gains the day here, Señor Caiphas,"

The usurer felt a deathlike sweat break out upon him; but, after a terrible struggle, hatred conquered avarice, and rising up wrathfully, he cried in furious accents:

"Enough of trifling! Let us end this at once! Two thousand dollars that he does not dance with my daughter! Soledad, let us go home. Señor Steward, you can come to my house at once and collect the money."

This exorbitant bid was the stab of the coward—sure, deadly, fatal! All Manuel's savings put together did not amount to this sum.

The orphan knew this, and remained as if stupefied.

"Give it up, man! give it up! He'll pay for all his villainies together in hell."

"Don't insist, Manuel; the girl was going to dance with you, and the rest should not matter to you so much."

Such were the exhortations addressed to the mortified youth by the very persons who had offered to stand surety for him.

The retired captain, only, still exclaimed, trembling with rage:

"Dispose of my pay for two months! I will live upon live devils!" Manuel heard nothing of all this, and the people began to think him crushed, vanquished, a subject for pity. But Don Trinidad Muley, who knew his ward better than anyone else, seeing him motionless, mute, with white lips, following every movement of Don Elias, as if he were

watching for an opportunity to throw himself upon the usurer and tear him limb from limb, ran to the young man's side and said to him imperiously:

"Manuel, go home! I command you to do so!"

The hero's son gave a roar of anguish, as the wild animal roars when his quivering flesh feels the hot iron of the tamer, and he said with savage humility:

"Without killing that man?"

"Manuel, go home!" replied the rector of Santa Maria.

"He has conquered me with the money which he robbed from my father!" continued Manuel, his fury breaking out afresh as he spoke. "He has refused to allow me, the descendant of the Vene-gases, the son of the man who died to preserve to him his ill-gotten millions, to dance with his innocent daughter, to give her an embrace of reconciliation between our two houses. Ah, thief! assassin! tyrant! You shall pay me for this with your blood!"

"Hear him! hear him!" said the usurer meantime to his daughter, who had thrown her arms around his neck, and was clinging to him as if to shield him from Manuel's fury. "Hear how the man who is courting your dowry, insults and threatens me! Hear how that swindler tries to win you, instead of paying me the million he owes me!"

Manuel, whom Don Trinidad Muley restrained with difficulty—having been obliged, for that purpose, to call in the aid of the Infant Jesus, to whose image he pointed with fervent gestures and entreat-

ies—heard Don Elias' last words, but far from becoming more enraged, he all at once became calm, with that swiftness of transition that had always characterized him, and remained motionless, speechless, cold, as if he had been turned into marble.

"I?—I?—I owe you a million!" he at last found voice to say, in tones of noble ingenuousness.

"As if you did not know it," replied Don Elias boldly, like one who was now sure of his ground. "Did not your father owe me three millions? Did he not pay me two? And does not he who owes three and pays two, remain owing one? And you, my fine fellow, you, who are his son, and who have not renounced your inheritance, owe me that million, as I owe my soul to God. So that, gentlemen," he continued, addressing the Brotherhood, "all the former bids are null and should be void of effect, since the money which this young man offered was mine, as every dollar he has or may have in the future will be until he has paid me the million he owes me."


"What a wretch! What a vile speech!" "And the worst of it is that what he says is true!" "Is there no one to put an end to him?" the boldest among the crowd were beginning to mutter.

"Let no one touch him!" cried Manuel sternly. "Things have just changed their aspect and it is my place now to defend his life. I was ignorant of the fact that I was his debtor; but having learned that I am—for your faces tell me clearly enough that he speaks the truth—I do not wish anyone to imagine

that I desire this monster's death, in order that I may not have to pay him. I will pay him. Let no one be astonished at what I say. I will pay him! I am absolutely certain that I am not deceiving myself. I know of what I am capable! Rest tranquil, then, astute old fox, for if Don Rodrigo Venegas was willing to perish among the flames so that it might not be said that he had tried to cheat you, his son will have the courage to do something still more terrible, still more painful—he will never look upon your enchanting daughter again until he has acquired the million which you demand from him. I am going from the town, gentlemen," he added in solemn accents, addressing the multitude, "I am going away from Spain. But I will return! I will return with gold enough to pay my debt, and to smother my creditor, afterward, in ounces! I will come back, yes, and I will come to this very spot, on the same day as this (I swear it, by my father's soul!) to purchase the happiness of clasping in my arms that angel whom the vile Jew has robbed from Heaven, that unhappy girl, who calls herself his daughter! Woe to him who casts his eyes upon her meanwhile! Woe to him who seeks to win her! Soledad is mine, and I will return to claim her and to kill the man who may have dared even to think of coming between us two! As for you, soul of my soul, I know that you will have the patience to wait for me! Adieu, Soledad, my life! Adieu, Señor Rector! Adieu, my Child Jesus! Do not forget Manuel Venegas!"

With these words, tearing himself from Don Trinidad Muley's arms and throwing a kiss to Soledad and another to the Child of the Ball, he turned and walked rapidly in the direction of the town and soon passed out of their sight.

Soledad had remained outwardly impassive from the moment when her father's life had ceased to be in danger; but when she attempted to walk, her limbs failed her and they were obliged to carry her in a chair to the coach which had once been that of the Venegases.



Book III.

THE RETURN OF THE ABSENT ONE.

CHAPTER I.

EVENING.

NOW that we know as much as the best instructed about the gallant horseman who was crossing the summit of the Sierra when we raised the curtain on the first scene of the present drama, it is time for us to hurry after him so that we may enter with him, on his return to it after eight years of mysterious absence, the Moorish town which was his cradle.

The glorious day was within an hour of its close when our hero at last emerged from the labyrinth of peaks and precipices which the great cordillera here forms, and beheld in the distance the wide horizon of his native province, its level fields, its green vineyards, its dark olive plantations and the familiar outlines of the distant hills which bound the district. The beloved town, the mistress of all that territory, was still hidden behind the clay hills which overhang it on the west like a canopy, but it was already easy to distinguish—especially for one having a previous

knowledge of the locality—the needle-like tower of the cathedral, and the round watch-tower of the Arab citadel, ruined a few years later.

The Child of the Ball reined in his horse in order to contemplate the well-remembered panorama. The keenest emotion was depicted on his countenance, less hard and haughty now than before the sadness of absence and the lessons of life had formed his soul. He reverently removed his hat, by way of salutation to his *lares patriæ*, and breathed a deep sigh of relief, like one who has just concluded a long and arduous task.

"Are you ill, Señor?" asked the muleteer, observing his agitation.

Manuel did not answer; he replaced his hat hastily on his head, and put spurs to his horse, as if to free himself from this importunate witness.

Half an hour later, when the sun was sinking in the west, the Malagan once more overtook the haughty personage, who had again reined in his horse on the summit of the woody declivity that leads from the lowest plateau of the mountain to the broad plain on which the town is situated, and who was gazing at the caves, at the street of Santa María, at the Gardens, and even at the ancient house of his ancestors, which was distinguishable among all the others from a tall, straight cypress that overtopped its roof. This edifice especially attracted his eager attention. The hapless man did not know that no one lived there now. He knew nothing of all that had occurred during his absence.

But let us not anticipate events which the reader will learn all too soon.

When the muleteer came up with the loads, Manuel rode on, but now very slowly, and, partly from compunction at having left unanswered the poor man's friendly question, partly in order to divert his thoughts, he entered into conversation with him, saying:

"Were you ever absent from Malaga for any considerable length of time?"

The footman's face lighted up with pleasure at being questioned, and in the twinkling of an eye he had made the following answer:

"Was I? I thought that was where it hurt! You have very likely just come from the other end of the world, and that is why it affected you so strangely to see your native place! First, I was two years in the country of the Moors (not in prison, don't imagine that, but for my own pleasure), and when I served the king—that is to say, Christina—later I received my discharge, after we took the Bridge of Luchana, where I was wounded. You ask me if I know what it is to suffer hardships? Ask my poor mother whom she was thinking of all that miserable Christmas Day, well called also the Sorrowful Day, on which Espartero took Bilbao. Fancy that I passed it lying on the snow, wounded and bleeding, in the most complete desertion and solitude. But what is that parrot saying?"

"Soledad,"* the parrot had repeated distinctly.

* Solitude.

Manuel smiled for the first time during the whole of the journey, and said to the muleteer:

"Were you ever in the town to which we are going?"

"No, Señor, never; but I know that it is a fine town, although the people there are very quarrelsome. You were born there, I suppose, and left it, when you were old enough, to go seek your fortune in the Indies. That's what everyone does! If you should ever think of returning there inquire in Malaga on your way for Frascuito Cataduras—that's the name people know me by—and take me with you as a servant; for with mule-driving, I'll never be any richer than I am now."

But Manuel was no longer listening to the Malagan; he had stopped his horse again, still more deeply moved than on the former occasion. From the distance came the merry chime of bells, whose sound the young man no doubt recognized. Certain it is that his face expressed a delight, a tenderness, a painful joy, if one may say so, which would have made another man shed tears.

"Come, Señor, calm yourself!" exclaimed the muleteer. "If you are afraid of anything, here am I, and we have there four guns——"

"Woe to you," interrupted Manuel, "if you should say to anyone that you have seen me thus! On the other hand, if you are silent I will reward your discretion well. I do not wish that my weaknesses should be made public. And now, let us go on."

The truth was that the impetuous young man

could no longer bear the weight of his emotion, seeing which, and as he could not gallop on in advance of the muleteer, down the precipitous hillside, he resolved to continue with him, so that he might not again have to listen to his own thoughts, in the presence of so inquisitive an observer.

"Those bells that are ringing," he went on, with feigned naturalness, "are the bells of Santa Maria de la Cabeza, announcing that to-morrow, the first Sunday in April, there will be a grand festival in the parish, as there is every year on that day. What gayety and animation must reign there at this moment! I know a person who directed those joyful chimes when he was a boy. How time passes, while things remain the same! You shall see what a fine procession will leave that church to-morrow afternoon—the procession of the Child of the Ball! And if you stay in the town until the day after to-morrow, you can go to the raffle, to the caves, where there are always amusing adventures. There everything is put up to auction—dances, embraces, happiness, the salvation of the soul, the fate of human beings! But the sun has set and the descent is now less steep. Let us make haste, so as to be able to ford the river before nightfall, for I should be sorry if those loads were to get wet."

And as the descent was in fact now easier, Manuel put spurs to his horse and soon found himself alone on the plain; that is to say, between the long rows of poplar trees which announce there the proximity of the river he referred to. The town itself was

still at a considerable distance; but he was now in a certain sense under its walls.

The shadows of evening had begun to fall, and the sweet mystery of the hour, the amenity of the spot, the humid freshness of the air, in whose vernal fragrance he could recognize the odors of the trees, the plants, and the grasses among which he had grown up, the harmonious murmur, forever the same and to him so familiar, which the humblest choristers of the Creator of the universe send up at night-fall, from the pools of water, from the fields of young corn, all united to wrap Manuel in a profound moral peace, very different from happiness, but a better counselor for the soul than the eagerness of desire. He remained motionless, then, for a few moments, on that tranquil margin of the Rubicon of his sad history, as if to rest his weary spirit before the supreme emotions that awaited it, or perhaps asking himself calmly whether, in place of going toward happiness, he were not going toward irremediable misery. Was Soledad living? Was she faithful to him—she, who had never given him any promise? Had any man dared to take her for a wife? Was the terrible old man living? Would he continue to refuse all his advances? Would Soledad dare, in that case, to unite herself to the son of Don Rodrigo Venegas, after the terrible scene of the raffle? Did she love him well enough for this? What awaited the outlaw on his return from his long exile? Dreadful sorrows? Cruel disappointments? Renewed strife? Sanguinary scenes? His

own death, as the end of all his anguish, all his toil?

The approach of the muleteer with the mules roused the young man from this state of supreme disquietude, not less keen than, although of a different nature from that of Diego Marsilla, when the latter was stopped by the highwaymen almost within sight of the walls of Teruel.

Our traveler crossed the river and entered the long lanes, bordered by fragrant trees of paradise and by briar, thorn, and other species of hedges, which lead, through extensive vineyards, to the gates of the town, from which they were now distant only about fifty paces when, passing by a certain solitary hermitage with a covered porch, which had stood there from time immemorial, a woman's voice was heard saying:

"Manuel, is it you? Do me the favor to let me speak a word to you."

CHAPTER II.

REALITY.

MANUEL reined in his colt and, by the light of the lamp which illuminated that humble sanctuary, he saw, standing at the entrance to the before-mentioned porch, which was separated from the interior of the hermitage by a wooden railing, the imposing figure of a tall woman, dressed in black, who added, when she saw that he had stopped :

"Then it is indeed you? Thanks be to the Holy Virgin! I feared that you might have taken another road."

"Yes, Señora, it is I," responded Manuel, filled with amazement. "And you—who are you? I think I recognize that voice."

"I am Soledad's mother," responded the woman gently.

Almost before the young man had heard these words he was on the ground.

"Señá María Josefa!" he exclaimed, greatly agitated. "Wait a moment, Señora. Listen, muleteer: go on you in advance and wait for me at the entrance to the town. Beware how you say a word to anyone!"

The Malagan proceeded on his way, dying to know something of what he had been forbidden to

tell, and Manuel fastened his beast to one of the ancient white poplars that at that time surrounded the hermitage, the porch of which he at last entered hastily, saying in an affectionate voice:

"You in this place? You waiting for me? What does this mean? What has happened? How did you know that I was coming?"

"Through Don Trinidad Muley," answered the woman whom we may now call aged, seizing Manuel's hands and carrying them to her face that they might touch her tears. "But don't blame his reverence for having revealed your secret to me. It was necessary that I should know it. Besides, where you are concerned he has no secret from me. He knows how much I love you, how much I have loved you ever since your father died. Come, sit down here. We have a great deal to talk about, and I am ready to drop with fatigue."

So saying, the good woman drew the young man toward one of the brick seats which still decorate the porch, and which serve as a resting place for travelers and devotees.

Manuel was bewildered, or rather he was lost in a sea of conflicting conjectures. He seated himself, then, without daring to ask any further questions, lest he should thus dispel his last illusory hopes. But seeing that his interlocutor was not able to explain herself, either, he said at last, with forced resignation:

"Something either very good or very bad must have happened to make you come to meet me out-

side the town in this way. I do not wish to imagine the worst, and I will begin by supposing what would be happiness for everyone. Have you come to ask me not to enter the town in a hostile attitude, because your husband has consented to make, or may be persuaded to make a compromise with me, if I agree to abide by such or such conditions? Answer me with entire frankness. Ah! you are silent! Then that is not what you have come to ask of me?"

"No, Manuel, it is not that," responded the afflicted mother. "What I have come to ask of you is that you will turn back, that you will not enter the town. I beseech it of you, by what you love most in the world!"

"By what I love most in the world!" Manuel repeated sarcastically. "What a contradiction and what a mockery! How many objects do you suppose I love? Turn back! Not enter the town! That is very easy to say; but ask a river to turn back to its source in the mountain, and see what heed it will pay you. But why weary ourselves? I know now all that you had to say to me—that Don Elias continues his opposition; that we are just as we were at the beginning—that I shall have to make a fight. Well, then, I will fight as much as may be necessary!"

"It is not that, either, Manuel. My husband now opposes nothing."

"Ah! Don Elias consents!" exclaimed the young man, filled with surprise and delight.

"Well, then, what detains us? What can the rest of the world matter to us? I am willing to agree to everything. I will give full satisfaction to the poor old man. I know that I was too cruel that day! Besides, I have brought him his million. I have it here in letters on Malaga. My father, seeing me pay this debt, will bless my union with Soledad. Ah, Señora! I have just named her who is the soul of my life. Speak to me of her! For eight years I have heard nothing of her. Tell me that she loves me still; that it is she who has won over her father. You are still silent! Señora, be more compassionate. Relieve me from this terrible suspense! What is the matter? What has occurred during my absence?"

"Calm yourself, my son. It frightens me to see you like this!" responded the poor woman, her tears breaking forth afresh. "I will tell you all if you will swear to me to turn back, if you will swear to me not to enter the town. Oh, don't look like that! Don't be angry! My God! Why does this man wish to hear of misfortunes? Why does he wish to be as unhappy as I am?"

"Speak, Señora, for Christ's sake, and, above all, do not tell me again to turn back! That is a sacrilege, when I have just come back after eight years of expatriation and struggle, when I have traveled thousands of leagues with the one thought—to arrive at the place where I have now arrived! Speak quickly, or I shall mount my horse and go to your house to learn for myself the horrible thing

you are trying to conceal from me. But I am mistaken—I am torturing myself too cruelly? It cannot be possible that Soledad is dead! No doubt your husband requires something very difficult; something absurd. Am I right? Is that it? Don't distress yourself, then. Everything shall be arranged with calmness and moderation."

Señá María Josefa hesitated for a moment, and then murmured in a hollow voice:

"I tell you again that my husband requires nothing. My husband is dead!"

"God be praised!" exclaimed the Child of the Ball, with the fierce solemnity of an implacable judge. "If there be another life after this, my father will have been already avenged. I forgive the author of all my misfortunes."

"I also forgive you," responded the sorrowful widow, "the cruelty with which you receive the news of one of my sorrows, and I entreat you to let this conversation end here. Go, Manuel; go back to the place you have come from and seek to learn no more misfortunes."

The young man rose to his feet, terrified at hearing these last words.

"God of Israel!" he cried, in an accent of super-human grief, "then my misery is certain! The earth opens beneath my feet! The heavens press down upon my head! The world has come to an end. Soledad is dead!"

"What are you saying, wretched man?" replied the mother, filled with horror. "My daughter

dead! Ah! do not think it. Your poor heart has once more deceived you! If that were so, I too would have died! If that were so, I would not now be here! There—come, sit down—calm yourself. You are killing me with all the wild fancies that come into your head!”

Manuel exhaled a deep sigh as if he had just awakened from a frightful dream, and, throwing himself into the old woman’s arms, he stammered with infinite gentleness:

“Soledad lives! Ah, how much I have suffered in a few brief moments! God forgive you for it.”

And he remained as if wrapped in an ecstasy of happiness.

“That is to love!” murmured the afflicted widow, with deep emotion.

“Soledad lives, and Don Elias is dead!” continued the young man, after a few moments. “Don Elias, my implacable enemy, her enemy, your own enemy! Do you suppose, my dear mother, that I did not know of the love and the protection which you always bestowed upon me? Well, I knew of it! Don Trinidad Muley made me acquainted with it all. The good Don Trinidad, my friend, my guardian, my second father!”

“I spoke to him to-day,” Señá María Josefa hastened to say, “and it is his opinion as well as mine that you ought——”

“Don’t say that to me again!” interrupted the young man, caressing her. “What whim is this? Why speak to me of not entering the town when

fate has arranged everything for our perfect happiness? What new obstacle stands in the way of it? Some scruple of the good priest, or some unfounded doubt of your own! Perhaps you believe that Soledad does not love me? She does love me, then, even though she herself should tell you the contrary! I know it! My soul knows it! I know her. She conceals her feelings; but our affection is like the sun that, although it may be for awhile veiled by clouds, never ceases to shine. Ah, Señá María! I am now another man. I am good, I am peaceable. It is not for nothing that one travels around the globe twice, as I have done! It is not for nothing that one lives so much and in so many different ways, as I have lived! Thus it is that all my sentiments and ideas have changed in these eight years, except my love for Soledad, and my care for the honor of my name. Oh! how I have battled against fate in Africa, in India, in the Philippines, and in both Americas! And how greatly fortune has favored me! I am richer than my father ever was, even in his most prosperous days. In Malaga I left a fortune. In the valise on my horse I bring arrobas of gold and precious stones. I have been a general in South America. I have conquered Indian *caciques*, who are the same as kings; and I myself might have been a king among those savage tribes. Say nothing of all this; for no one would believe it. You shall see what presents I bring Soledad! And you also! For Don Elias himself I had a magnificent gift!"

"Accursed be money! That is to blame for everything!" said the mother in ominous tones, tears streaming from her eyes, which were still bent upon the ground, while Manuel, sitting beside her and almost embracing her, told her, with the innocent ingenuousness of a child, how he had succeeded in winning the Golden Fleece.

"Accursed be money! I say too," responded the young man, with some bitterness. "But I do not say that now for the first time; I have always said it; and if I went about the world in search of more gold than our Sierra could give me, you know why I did so! For the rest, the fortune I bring with me has been won honorably on the field of battle, like the treasures of many European kings; I am still as ever the son of Don Rodrigo Venegas! But now let us go to the town. The muleteer is waiting for me. I will walk with you, leading my horse by the bridle, and, if you consent, this very night we will speak to your daughter and everything can be settled in a few words. Come, Señora, do not let us waste precious time."

And, so saying, the young man rose to his feet as if resolved to set forward at once.

Señá María Josefa did not rise; she buried her face in her hands and began to moan piteously, exclaiming in heart-rending accents:

"Ah, my God! Ah, my God! What is to become of us? This is perdition! My poor, poor daughter!"

Manuel became cold as marble, and a death-

like sweat streamed down his altered countenance.

"Señora," he stammered at last; "let us speak plainly. What new act of infamy has been perpetrated during my absence? Tell me quickly, or I will this instant go to the town to learn it for myself!"

"Manuel! Manuel!" cried the poor old woman; "not to the town! Let us go somewhere else! Wherever you choose. I will accompany you to the end of the world! I will spend the remainder of my days with you. I will be a loving mother to you—a tender mother!"

"And Soledad, then?" cried the Child of the Ball frantically. "What about Soledad? What has become of her? Quick! Quick! without concocting any more lies!"

"I don't know—don't ask me. Soledad does not deserve our love! We will give her up. I myself will never see her again. There, come, my son! Call that man and let us go to America, to Portugal, to the Philippines, wherever you wish——"

"And Soledad?" repeated Manuel, with such violence that the mother drew back terrified. "What have you done with your daughter? With whom is Soledad to remain?"

There was a moment's silence, during which could be heard the tempestuous beating of those two hearts.

Manuel was the first to recover courage to go forward toward the abyss, and he said with the awful calmness of the suicide:

"You have nothing to explain to me now—Sole-dad is married."

For sole response the mother fell upon her knees, and stretched out her clasped hands toward the young man as if imploring pardon.

Once more a funereal silence reigned.

Venegas remained for a few seconds crushed under the weight of the ruins which had just overwhelmed his soul. A whole world had fallen upon it. The colossus had for an instant, only an instant, the supreme illusion of thinking his misfortune greater than he could bear, imagining now, as on the sorrowful night after his father's funeral, that he had died and been buried.

But it was not long before the wild beast in him recovered its strength and fierceness under the ruins of his blighted youth, and it emerged from these ruins much more terrible than from the earthquake which had put an end to his childhood; he uttered a dreadful cry, which made the noble animal that was waiting for him near by rear and tremble with terror, and, bending over the terrified victim who lay at his feet, he said in hoarse accents:

"Who—who is he? Who has married my wife? What is the audacious man's name? But what matters his name to me? He shall die, whoever he be! He shall die, though he were to hide himself in the center of the earth! Of that we need talk no more—it is decided! But tell me, vile old woman, liar, whiner, worse a thousand times than the scorpion who was your husband—how could you consent

that Soledad—— What did you do to persuade her? How could she lend herself—— Ah! the hypocrite! the shameless woman! the vile creature, that I took to be an angel! To marry another man! How horrible! How loathsome! What misery! You are all of the same brood of vipers—father, mother, and daughter!”

“She is innocent!” responded the old woman, her pride at last beginning to rise up in protest against these barbarous insults.

“She shall die!” said Manuel, extending his arm as if making a vow.

“It was her father who obliged her to marry. She did not wish to marry. I swear it to you by all that is most sacred!”

“She shall die!” repeated Manuel implacably.

“You shall die a thousand deaths first, dragon of hell!” at last cried the mother, raising herself until her face touched the young man’s. “You have before you a mother ready for anything—to kill, to die, to weep, until your heart of stone becomes softened, to wait upon you as a servant—anything, except to see her daughter suffer, except to see her darling grandson left fatherless! Now you know it, monster; you can take whatever course you choose.”

A hysterical and savage burst of laughter broke from Manuel, and re-echoed through the silent fields.

“The shameless creature has had a child!” he at last roared convulsively. “A child by someone!

How this vermin multiplies! How many, how many of them I have to kill, beginning with you, who are the defender of them all! Repeat the creed, Señá María!"

The old woman uttered a piercing shriek, looking upon herself as doomed, and, as she was unable to escape, she again fell upon her knees, and clung to the feet of the madman.

"Thus! thus! at my feet!" he exclaimed with Satanic joy. "Listen in that posture to my instructions, and, perhaps, by obeying me in every particular you may obtain some commutation of your punishment. It is not now that pitiful traitor who is living in concubinage with your daughter who is talking to you; it is I, Soledad's true husband, who am speaking to you now! Tell that man to leave the house where he is now in the way, where I shall go to-night. I do not know whether to kiss my wife or to strike her, before killing her. Tell him that early to-morrow morning I shall find him, no matter where he may hide himself, following his trail as I would that of a cowardly martin or a thievish fox, and I will kill him as I would an insect. Tell Soledad that I have arrived; that she is to put her child in the foundling asylum, and to adorn herself and to wait for me until I go to see her, or send her word to come to me. Tell her that I—that Manuel Venegas, the Child of the Ball—— Oh! tell her nothing! Oh! my God! My head reels! My brain is giving way! Air! air! My poor Soledad! Soledad of my soul! Soledad! Soledad!"

And thus crying, sobbing, and laughing, by turns, but without shedding a tear, he staggered out of the hermitage, mounted his horse, and, turning aside from the path, disappeared among the dark plantations, as if he were fleeing at once from the land from which he had been absent so many years, and from the town at whose gates he had just received his deathblow.

CHAPTER III.

OF WHAT THE INHABITANTS OF THE TOWN THOUGHT AND SAID THAT NIGHT.

THE unexpected news that the Child of the Ball had come back, rolling in riches and beside himself with rage, spread that very night through the town on the wings of fear, as if it were a question of the approach of the cholera or of a hostile army. The Malagan muleteer, wandering with his three loaded mules through those to him unfamiliar streets, not knowing where to seek a shelter, and inquiring of the passers-by for "a Don Manuel Venegas, who had come with him from Malaga, and of whom a sort of wandering spirit clad in black had taken possession, as he was passing by a certain hermitage," was the first person who, near vesper time, revealed to the public the interesting news, confirmed shortly afterward by an old servant of Señora de Arregui (otherwise La Dolorosa), who had had to go to the pharmacy of the plaza for lime leaves and orange flowers for Señá María Josefa, and who related, to everyone she met on the way, all that had taken place in the rustic sanctuary, word for word, as the mother had just related it to her daughter.

The night was now too far advanced for people in so old-fashioned a town to remain very long in

the streets and squares, gossiping about and commenting upon even so important an event; therefore they all contented themselves with satisfying themselves of the truth of the fact, and then went home to discuss it at their ease with their families, at the same time with the salad at supper. We may affirm, then, that everyone in the town, from the inmates of the bishop's palace to those of the meanest gypsy hovel, went to bed that night thinking of our hero, of the tragic story of his youth, of his love for Soledad, of the threats he had made before going away, and of the conflicts to which his return would undoubtedly give rise.

Those who were in want of money remembered, in addition, the splendid generosity with which the son of Don Rodrigo used to help the poor out of their troubles when he possessed only a few thousand reals, and they flattered themselves, on learning that he had arrived from the Indies with three mule loads of ounces, that they would get rid of their debts and their difficulties by merely presenting him with a statement of the amount they needed to set them afloat. The marriageable girls, especially the so-called señoritas, asked if he had come back unmarried, and said dreadful things about La Dolorosa. The doctors reflected that they had another good patient; the sacristans calculated how much the funeral of so rich an Indian would cost, supposing that he were to die of grief at finding his old sweetheart married; the bullies knew—*sede vacante*—that the rightful proprietor of the precari-

ous authority which they had temporarily exercised had arrived, and they agreed, therefore, that the Child of the Ball must kill Antonio Arregui—such was the name of La Dolorosa's husband—so that he might be hanged as a consequence, supposing that Antonio Arregui did not in the meantime kill him; the new bishop of the diocese, a very holy and far-seeing man, had his suspicions that this strange personage might have come to disturb the consciences of his flock; the alcalde and the judge feared that there was work in store for them, and the notaries and attorneys, who were paid according to tariff, were, on the other hand, pleased at the same prospect. The whole town, in short, augured a frightful tragedy, as they settled themselves to sleep that night, as comfortably as possible, conscious perhaps, as they tucked the bed clothing around them, that they did not love their neighbor as themselves, and rejoicing undoubtedly that none of their family or their particular friends were in the hard case of Antonio Arregui, of Soledad, or of Manuel Venegas.

To this custom of keeping early hours there were two exceptions in the town: one of them was the pharmacy of the plaza, which did not close up until ten, and where the clerk or practitioner who had charge of it, a very important person, destined to figure prominently in the rest of our story, formed the center of a circle of young men, for the most part uncultured, although possessed of some learning in matters sufficiently delicate; the other was the house of an ancient hidalgo—this title was now given to no

one, nor did the privileges inherent in it any longer exist—a very wealthy and polished man, a great admirer of Moratin, who had sided with the French in 1808 and in 1823, and who, at the time we speak of, was a member of the secret society called the “Jovellanos”; a house which did not close its doors until, at eleven o’clock, the five or six plebeians of *certain idcas* whom the family deigned to receive after supper, that is to say, punctually at nine, had retired.

In the shop, or to speak more correctly, in the back shop, the arrival of the Child of the Ball was commented upon at length, one of the company even knowing and relating the fact—having just learned it from the sister of Don Trinidad Muley’s housekeeper—that the priest had received a letter from the young man, a fortnight before, dated at Malaga and containing no address, so that no answer might be returned, in which he told him, in the strictest confidence, that on Saturday, the 5th of April, he would arrive in the town, by which time he desired that a good house in a good situation might be engaged for him and partially furnished; that Manuel Venegas it was, consequently, and not the new dean, as had been said, who was going to occupy the ancient building in this very Plaza, known as the Precentor’s House; that the before mentioned sister of the priest’s housekeeper was already installed in it with the high dignity of housekeeper to Don Rodrigo’s son, in which capacity she had just received the three loads of gold coin,

pearls, diamonds, and rubies, which the muleteer had so long driven about the streets; and, in short, that nothing had been heard of the Child of the Ball since he had been seen by some guards, long after nightfall, galloping through the plantations of the plain, as if either he or his horse had gone mad; but that Don Trinidad Muley had already set out in search of him, mounted on a donkey, so that it was to be hoped (*fared*, the narrator said) that if he should find him in time and succeed in calming him, nothing would happen for that night.

As all of the company in the back shop had at their fingers' ends the history of Soledad's marriage to Antonio Arregui, and knew who this individual was, and were acquainted with all the other events that had taken place in the house of Don Elias Perez, during the absence of Manuel Venegas from the town, there was no reason why these events should be related here, and they spent the rest of the evening in giving each one his views as to the most probable and fitting *dénouement* to the tragedy, on which point Vitriol, so the clerk was called, expressed the opinion that all the personages, that is to say, Manuel, Antonio, La Dolorosa, her mother, and, if it came to that, even Don Trinidad Muley himself, ought to die.

On the other hand, owing to there being a stranger present—no less a personage than a daughter of Madrid, a second cousin of a marquis, who had come to the town to sell her last remaining estates, and who was a guest in the house of the illustrious

Moratinian, recommended to him in an autograph letter by one of the ministers of the day, and, according to the statement of the angry Esparterists, a member also of the before mentioned secret society—there was an indispensable reason for narrating on this night, and in this exalted company, the life and exploits of Don Rodrigo, of the usurer, of Manuel, of Soledad, and of Antonio Arregui, a task performed admirably by the master of the house himself, correspondent of the Spanish Academy, and doctor in *utroque jure*, called, for further identification, Don Trajano Pericles de Mirabel y Salmeron, which pagan and illustrious baptismal names—be it said, by the way—were sufficient proof that his ingenuous father had been, like many other Spaniards in the reign of Carlos III., an ardent admirer of the encyclopedia, and also of baptism.

This competent person began, then, by relating all that we have narrated in the Second Book of the present work; that is to say, all that had taken place up to the moment when Manuel Venegas left the town after the memorable scene of the raffle; and, when the narrator had reached this critical point in his story, he drank some water, took breath, and a pinch of snuff, and continued in the following terms.

But, before reproducing what he said, it will not be amiss to bestow some attention upon the before mentioned guest, and also on a certain youth, desperately enamored of her, who now fluctuated there between suicidal thoughts and bliss.

CHAPTER IV.

TWO LIKENESSES, BY WAY OF INTERLUDE.

THE aristocratic Madridlenian was verging on thirty, and was a fine-looking woman, tall, graceful and dashing, whose commanding elegance more than compensated for the ravages which a life of continual excitement had made in her natural beauty. She had a great deal of cleverness, a great deal of wit, and, more than all, a great deal of knowledge of the world; she was undoubtedly acquainted, for she had received letters which proved it, with the most notable people in Madrid, from Don Evaristo Perez de Castro, at that time president of the Council of Ministers, to Olozaga, the most distinguished orator of the opposition; she spoke French, English, and Italian, and was always reading books in those languages, not only literary works, but works on medicine, on natural history—a study for which she had a great fondness—and occasionally on anti-religious philosophy; she went, however, to mass on Sundays and holidays of obligation, and she even took pleasure in the conversation of learned and well-dressed churchmen; she played the piano perfectly, sang from memory whole operas; rode on horseback in every style; she declared that she knew how to swim, as she would

prove when summer arrived; finally, she could shoot very well with the gun and the pistol, and, notwithstanding, or rather because of all this, she had been introduced to Señor de Mirabel, not as a married woman or a widow, but as a spinster, which appeared to those benighted provincials, both male and female, much more extraordinary and surprising than all the aforesaid accomplishments taken together.

"She is a Diana of the chase!" Don Trajano would exclaim, proud and delighted to have this notability as a guest in his house, and more captivated by her charms and *savage modesty* (*sic*) than was becoming in a man of his years, respectability, and wealth.

"I do not deny that she may be a Diana, as far as chastity is concerned," his wife would answer him when they were alone, "but who knows but she may turn out a Diana of the hook?"

The truth was that the wife of the jurisconsult feared that, at the end of the feast, her husband would be compelled to purchase the unproductive lands of the court-lady at whatever price the latter might take it into her head to ask for them.

On the other hand, the before mentioned youth entertained a fanatical, blind, unquestioning adoration for this comparative divinity, an adoration which we can better comprehend by giving a look into his mind than by weighing her merits. What was taking place there was this:

In almost every second-rate European town, and

especially in old and stationary towns like the one with which we are concerned, there has always been, since the beginning of our restless century, an organist who aspires to eclipse Rossini; a rhymester who aspires to eclipse Lord Byron; or a farrier, a reader of the newspapers, who aspires to eclipse Marat; some pale and melancholy youth, in short, who shuns the society of his fellow-beings to wander alone through the solitary fields, a focus of thought and bile, a liver with feet and hat; the declared enemy of all he sees around him and moral consul of everything foreign; whose feverish imagination observes the flight of the contemporaneous celebrities whom he most admires as the astronomer observes the course of the planets which he will never visit, and which revolve in the heavens indifferent to his admiration, without even suspecting the existence of observatories.

Of these Mirabeaus, Napoleons, and Balzacs in the bud, some die before they reach the age of twenty, crushed by the weight of their own genius, or by despair; others reconcile themselves, slowly and painfully, to descend to the level of their commonplace countrymen, and end as secretaries of the town council or clerks in some notary's office; others succeed in migrating to the metropolis of their country, Paris, Madrid, Vienna, or St. Petersburg, as the case may be, where they meet only with disappointments, and either die of hunger or shoot themselves, or fail still more deplorably, sliding down the inclined plane of want into the abyss of

dishonor; and some, finally, become great men—academicians, generals, ministers, millionaires, and bequeath their names to future generations.

We do not know what future fate may have had in store for the youth of whom we speak; but at this time he was the presumptive great author of the place and, truth to say, he showed himself to be possessed of some of the necessary qualities for being so. Romantic tragedies were his forte; Victor Hugo was his idol. He had already devoured all the books in the town, amounting to some thousands of volumes, procured from the suppressed convents of the friars and the library of a learned dean, an ardent lover of profane literature, who had just passed to a better life. He was the eighth of the twelve children—all males, like those of Jacob—of an attorney, not so rich in worldly goods as he was in heirs of his honorable name, who was able to give them food and raiment, but who was utterly unable to give them a professional education at the university, a thing which the good man lamented especially in the case of this son, his adored Pepito, whose genius he thought greater than that of any of the learned men of whom history speaks, or of any of the ministers who figure in the newspapers. He obliged him, then, to go to the palace to visit the new bishop of the diocese, just as he had asked Don Trajano to admit him to his receptions, when he learned of the distinguished connections of the guest of the former in Madrid; the fond father, whom God keep in his sacred glory! hoping, no

doubt, that his lordship, seized with admiration for the beautiful tragedies composed by the boy, would at once make him a canon, free of expense, in which case the path would lie open to him to the miter, the senate, the cardinal's hat, or even the tiara; or that the cousin of the marquis would recommend him to María Christina, to the end that that august lady might summon him to the court to appoint him to some high position.

For the rest Pepito led a solitary life, as much because the people of the town felt themselves humiliated by his learning and his pride, as because he disdained the company of those simple souls. At times he was overwhelmed by the sublime weariness of existence peculiar to privileged natures, and he envied the unambitious their simple happiness, and, more than all, he began to feel a hunger, which bordered on delirium, for the flatteries of the fair sex. But his heart told him loudly that the uncultured and over-scrupulous young ladies of the town would never venture to treat him with familiarity, nor would he ever be able to speak to them in a style and form that should not confuse and repel them; and, as a consequence of all this, he led a sufficiently unhappy life.

He was, indeed, still very young; not quite seventeen, when he enters into our story; he was ugly, in consequence of a tardy and violent physical development, to which his swollen nose and lips and the uncertainty of his voice still bore plain testimony. He had not yet completed his growth, or,

rather, his growth had been disproportionate; his complexion was sallow; the down was just beginning to show on his upper lip, and his eyes looked like two live coals. He dressed with detestable taste, although with neatness and decorum. In the matter of religion he was a disciple of Voltaire, and in politics he idolized Mirabeau; but no one had any suspicion of such horrors. These studies he pursued alone under the tiles of his house.

Such was the youth who had fallen in love with the Madridlenian, not as a mortal creature, but as one of the angels of the special heaven of romance. And this worship is comprehensible. She came from the world of which his thoughts were constantly full.

She figured in the front rank in the Olympus of the court. She had known Larra, more famous then for having killed himself than for having written his immortal works. She addressed Espronceda—Pepe, as the goddess was accustomed to call the demigod of those most favored times—in the second person. Her portrait had been painted in oil by the Duke of Rivas, the creator of “Don Álvaro ó la Fuerza del Sino!” She was visited by Pastor Díaz, the inspired singer of “La Mariposa Negra” and the “Elegía á la Luna!” *A. H. M. B. C.*

Finally, she had ~~assisted~~ at the first representation of “El Trovador” and of “Los Amantes de Teruel” and had thrown wreaths to their authors!

And then, this woman shed such a perfume around her! Her perfectly fitting gowns, which she

wore with easy grace, displayed to such advantage the rounded outlines of her finely molded figure! Nor was this all! Pepito knew—many others knew also, it was matter of public talk in the town—that the stranger bathed daily! Bathed! Like a nymph! or at least, a sultana or an houri! In nothing, nothing was she like other women! She did not hide, nor had she any reason to hide, her small feet, always divinely shod; she was always neat as a new pin; her nails resembled little rose leaves; when she walked, her petticoats and the silk of her gown rustled delightfully. Nor was she afraid to show her arms up to the shoulder; there was in her something of the noble frankness of a statue! It was undeniable that there was something of the goddess in her! In the illustrations to the Iliad the youth had seen figures like hers!

The Madridlenian knew only too well how things were with Pepito. She had considered his age and his circumstances, and she comprehended that generic love and poetic worship fomented equally that simultaneous conflagration of body and soul. She enjoyed greatly, then, the spectacle of this fierce combustion, and for nothing in the world would she have lessened it. Far from this, she heaped fuel on the fire on every possible occasion, putting in practice every art of coquetry for the very reason that she was resolved not to grant him even the most insignificant favor—not even so much as to allow him to kiss the coronet embroidered on her handkerchief!

And this was natural. In this town, where everything was observed and known, in this austere house where she passed for a St. Ursula, the Madridlenian had, of necessity, to forget her natural self, or, to speak more correctly, she had to bear constantly in mind the part she represented. Besides, there are women who run up the Corsair flag only among their peers; and the cousin of the marquis, the friend of the duke, the woman flattered by the poets in vogue, introduced by ministers, belonged to this class. She denied the audacious youth, then, as we have said, things which for her were the veriest trifles; avenging herself for her enforced inaction by the tortures she inflicted on another's heart. She had refused him, for instance, three hairs from her long ringlets, from those ringlets which the disappointed woman had perhaps often rifled to make watch chains, that were probably no longer in existence, for forgetful lovers! But she introduced into Mirabel's receptions the custom of giving the hand to gentlemen, and, when she gave hers to Pepito, she took delight in watching the expression of joy and pride on the poor boy's face. That hand, that had perhaps made so many fruitless efforts to retain ungrateful and perfidious Æneases, seemed to him a virginal lily, a gift of Heaven, the beginning of a mystic ladder which led to paradise!

Fortunately, there was no one in the town who could undeceive the young man. Perhaps the bishop and the judge divined the truth. But both were exemplary and discreet men, incapable of

scandalizing the public—and by no means disposed to earn the ill-will of the friend of the ministers.

Otherwise, there was no danger; for the ladies of the town, married and unmarried, although they feared to approach the elegantly dressed and accomplished stranger, neither hated nor envied her, seeing that the husbands and lovers and admirers of every kind, present or future, of those easily pleased females, experienced the same fear as they did, and would never venture to pay her even the most innocent compliment, and considering, cynical and terrible consideration of the most jealous! that so exquisite a woman would in no case fall in love with gallants so uncultured. These dames and damsels, then, contented themselves with not visiting her, whether from the aforesaid bashfulness, or at the suggestion of the stolid pride which the acid humors of modesty are apt to engender; but all this notwithstanding, they imitated, in so far as they could, the gowns and the style of dressing of the cousin of the marquis, many ordering from the capital, or having made at home, hats (bonnets they were called then) of the same style as hers, that is to say, a sort of poke-bonnet very fashionable at the time.

Let this digression suffice, then, and let us give ear to Don Trajano Pericles de Mirabel, who is about to relate to us "all that occurred in the matter of Manuel Venegas, after the latter had left the town."

That illustrious personage spoke as follows:

CHAPTER V.

OF HOW ANTONIO ARREGUI CAME TO MARRY.

"MONTHS, years, lustrums—or, at least, one lustrum and a part of another—passed without anything being heard of the ill-named Child of the Ball. More; until two hours and a half ago, no one in the town knew whether he was living or dead, whether he had succeeded in amassing a fortune, or was reduced to poverty, nor what zone, climate, or region of the globe had been the scene of his gigantic struggle with Fate."

"But why did he not write?" asked the Madrid-lenian, whose interest in this drama of real life, so adapted to the literary tastes of the day, may be easily understood.

"Neither did Don Diego write to Isabel de Segura, in the drama now so much in vogue, and which you admire so enthusiastically," Señor de Mirabel immediately answered. "Besides, and without making further comparisons, the son of my unfortunate friend was not a man to do things by halves, and, therefore, it is quite comprehensible that he should have been unwilling to give an account of his whereabouts and of the state of his funds. That would have been in a certain manner to be present and absent at the same time; which would have lessened

the prestige that always accompanies and magnifies the unknown and the mysterious—an artistic-literary doctrine which occurs to me in the ardor of improvisation, and in respect to which, oh, beautiful marchioness! we classics are of one mind with you romanticists."

"Go on," responded the veteran goddess.

"And then, why write?" continued the rejuvenated old man. "His terrible threats must still remain in the memories of the townspeople, and to repeat them would be like presupposing that anyone could forget them. As for writing to Soledad herself, needless to say that it would have been useless to do so, since the astute and vigilant Don Elias would have intercepted every letter. But, even setting this consideration aside, what could Manuel say to the young girl? Not to forget him? To love him? To wait for him until he should return? You know too well, my dear Doña Luisita, that those things are not asked, and I will even venture to add that to ask them is *contra producentem!* Ergo, my friend's son ought not to be found fault with, as he has been found fault with here to-night, for writing to no one during his long absence. In his case, I would have acted in the same way."

"You, Mirabel!" exclaimed the superannuated wife of the venerable jurisconsult. "Mind what you are saying. Are you going to compare yourself now with that boy?"

"Let me alone, Tecla! You know nothing about those maladies, considered in their artistic aspects,"

replied Don Trajano, so authoritatively that the poor woman regretted having opened her mouth.

The indigenous part of the company, on their sides, closed their eyes, as if to say that in no case would they dare to make observations to that species of Solomon, with toupee and whiskers, and much less in the presence of the superhuman stranger.

As for Pepito, it is to be observed that he had gone out for news, at the unanimous request of those present, a short time before Don Trajano had begun his narration.

"Yes, indeed!" continued the neo-pagan triumphantly. "Manuel acted as he ought to have done, allowing things to take their course and time to pass, so that each one might act *secundum se, naturaliter*, and without outward or extrinsic pressure. To have pursued a contrary course would have been to maintain a false and violent state of things, of very evil augury as *prolegomena* of possible nuptials! Let us drop this part of the subject, then, and bring Soledad on the tapis; for I see, Luisita, that you are longing to know how it was that the object of the adoration of the Child of the Ball came to marry another man, or how there was found another man who dared to marry her."

"*C'est ça!*" the court lady quickly responded.

"She says 'that is it,'" observed the Spanish-Frenchman, addressing his habitual guests. "Well, then," he continued presently, "Soledad was very ill for almost a year after the departure of the daring

Venegas, and during all that time her father thought of nothing but of nursing her, until, happily, by dint of petting and watching, and sending for doctors in every direction, he succeeded in bringing her back to health. Don Elias then applied himself, both personally and through others, to the task of finding her a husband, contriving that neither she nor her mother should observe his proceedings. Be it said, however, to the honor and glory of the absent lover, that no one was found willing to dispute with him the heart and hand of his bride-elect, and this, although the former usurer, 'would give the girl,' to use his own expression, 'buried in ounces,' even offering her to persons of very inferior station and destitute of means; and although, too, the girl continued to be a marvel of beauty, of whom everybody was enamored. In short, the diabolical plan of the former acolyte—to make himself the master of the bullies of the town, as an infallible means of becoming the master of Soledad—was realized; for it is unnecessary to say that not all who refused to marry the millionaire's daughter did so as much through friendly devotion to Manuel, as through fear of the threats and oaths which he had uttered before going away. For the rest, all who questioned Don Elias in regard to his daughter's own sentiments, in case they should determine to woo her, received the same answer:

"That is my affair," the old man would reply, with the utmost coolness. "You may rely on her consent."

"Prepare to be amazed, Luisita! (And let this go no further, ladies and gentlemen, for I am going to reveal to you a fact which is known to very few, and which was told me by the Riojan himself, one day when he came to consult me about other matters—and I wish to have no enmity with creatures like the one I am now going to mention); prepare to be amazed, I repeat! One person only, a young man, the ugliest man and the greatest coward in the town, a species of Quasimodo, without beauty of soul to make up for the deformity of his person (you will observe that I, too, am acquainted with Victor Hugo), a scoundrel and an infidel (for the reason that he was so ugly and so cowardly, not assuredly so cowardly and ugly because he was a scoundrel and an unbeliever—for I am not wanting in discernment in these matters); an enemy of God and man, whom everybody treated with scorn and contempt, although it could not be denied that he had some cleverness, and much learning, although of a detestable kind, a certain Vitriol, in short, who is still living, an orphan from his childhood and a clerk in the pharmacy of the Plaza, it was who dared, not to receive with favor the indications of the usurer, who never made any to him, not considering him a human being, but to take the initiative, and address a letter to Soledad and another to her father, offering himself as a candidate for the hand of the beautiful girl! The wretch brought forward, in support of his pretensions, with the utmost seriousness, his moral excellences, his great talents, his

culture (which the fool called superior to that of everyone in the place), his freedom from vices, his industry, his liberality in religious and political matters, and, more than all, the circumstance of his being entirely without fear of the hector called the Child of the Ball.

"Needless to say that both father and daughter treated these letters with contempt, taking them for a vulgar jest, but the young man, seeing that he obtained no answer, went so far as to speak of the matter to Don Elias himself, and the latter, who showed a demoniac temper at times, answered him by overwhelming him with abuse and ridicule, saying to him in conclusion:

"'May God save you, you venomous reptile, from sending any more letters to my daughter, for, although she contented herself before with making a dog eat your ridiculous declaration of love, I will make you yourself eat any letter you may have the audacity to send her in the future.'

"Vitriol turned greener than he was before and answered with a laugh, that frightened Caiphas: 'Poor dog! Take care he doesn't go mad! My love letter, preserved in such a casket, cannot but become converted into sulphuric acid.'

"And, this said, he returned to his house, where he remained confined by illness for two or three months.

"I have related this anecdote to you, in order that you may form an idea of the extremity at which things had arrived, owing to the obstinate

determination of the usurer to marry Soledad to anyone who was not Manuel Venegas, and also that you may comprehend what must have been the secret humiliation and distress of La Dolorosa in the difficult situation in which her unhappy fate had placed her. In appearance, however, our heroine continued the same as always—serene, impassive, silent regarding all that related to Manuel, affectionate and caressing with the bewitched Don Elias, accompanying him to church and in his walks, causing him to spend a fortune every year on dresses and jewels for her, and answering with coldly pitying smiles the young men who ventured to pay her any compliment—of a merely ordinary kind. God forgive me if I misjudge her! but in my opinion that girl, so rich and so beautiful, was angry and indignant to see that no man had the courage to brave death by marrying her, or, at least, wooing her.

“In this way six years passed. Don Elias Perez, weighed down by years and afflictions, was drawing near the tomb, and his despair knew no bounds at the thought that he was leaving Soledad unmarried, and that the hated Venegas might return the day least expected and claim her for his wife. The idea then occurred to him of removing with his family to some other country, where the not-to-be-forgotten threats of the Child of the Ball would not hang over the minds of the people, and it would be possible for him to find a husband for the heiress of his millions. But it was already too late! An obstinate cold rendered it impossible for him to leave

the town. He took to his bed to rise from it no more.

"As neither Don Elias nor La Dolorosa ever had friends or confidants, differing in this respect from the heroes of the stage, but little is known in regard to what may have passed at this time between father and daughter, or of the real sentiments of the latter. Her mother, only, whom the girl treated with the same indifference and reserve as did the Riojan, as if she too was unable to forgive her for having served honestly as a domestic the man whom she continued to serve humbly as a wife; Sená María Josefa, only, as I have said, had occasionally overheard some stray word of their conversations, and, on her authority, it is positively stated that Don Elias would often exclaim during his long illness:

" 'Daughter! you must marry before I die!'

"And that the girl always answered:

" 'Whom shall I marry? Vitriol? He is the only man who has ever asked me!'

"To which the mother generally added the following commentary, when speaking of the subject to her friends, before Antonio Arregui's appearance on the scene.

" 'Of course! The little rogue knows that she is protected by the shadow of the one who went away, and whom they all fear to see come back the moment least expected, and for that reason, and because she enjoys being a petted child, she does not contradict her father. Why should she, since no

one is going to court her? My daughter loves Manuel with her whole heart; but she is very clever and very self-possessed; she takes pride in not betraying her feelings, and she does not like to bind herself to anything or anyone. I never knew anyone with more coolness and composure!

"This maternal commentary, the key and guide to Soledad's subsequent conduct, seems to me very worthy of study, and you, marchioness, who are so fond of analyzing the sentiments, cannot fail to recognize from these words a much more feminine heart than that which the romanticists persist in placing beneath a woman's corset."

"Mirabel! for Heaven's sake! There are women present!" exclaimed the wife of the classic.

"Tecla! for the Virgin's sake!" replied the first speaker, "I am talking simply of literature—and the marchioness comprehends my moral autopsies very well. Am I not right, Luisita?"

"We will discuss that question by and by," responded the blue-stocking, looking with a significant grimace at the lawyer's wife so that the latter might not hate her. "At present I am dying to see you come down to what historians call 'our times.'"

"I will continue, then. And you, wife, don't be scandalized at abstract things. I do not speak now as a man, but as an artist! So listen to me, marchioness.

"The first time that the viaticum was administered to Don Elias Perez, that is to say, three

months before his death (this, too, was related by the widow), the old man embraced Soledad convulsively, and said to her with infinite anguish:

“‘Swear to me that you will never marry Manuel Venegas!’

“‘I will do nothing but what you command me,’ Soledad answered.

“‘But I may die—I am dying. Swear to me that when I close my eyes——’

“‘Then I will do what my mother commands me,’ the girl interrupted.

“‘Your mother is an imbecile!’ cried the usurer. ‘Your mother is the accomplice of that bandit! Swear to me, then, that even if she should command you to do it, you will not marry the man who is my murderer.’

“‘Father, I will not swear. That would be a sin!’ Soledad replied gravely. ‘But in everything else I will obey my father and my mother, as God has commanded, in the same law which forbids the taking of his holy name in vain.’

“‘In vain! In vain!’ repeated the dying man. ‘Ah! hypocrite! You think you will laugh at me after I am buried. You are an ungrateful girl; you delight in embittering the dying moments of the father who idolized you, who spent so much money in giving you pleasure, and who can now be of no further use to you!’

“‘I am a dutiful daughter, obedient to my parents and to God. Obedient to God before everything!’ cried the artful girl, raising her eyes to Heaven.

'Therefore I will not swear, either now or at any other time, no matter how much you may insult me.'

"'Well, then, I must not die yet,' responded the old man with astounding naturalness. 'Take away all those syrups, and give me something to eat. To-morrow I will be well. Your rebelliousness has brought me back to life. I feel a new energy within me, on which neither you nor I counted a little while ago. You have given me at least a year and a day of life, which is the time I need to utilize your obedience!'

"'You may command me.'

"'Of course I shall command you! To-morrow you will enter a convent as a novice, and if I do not succeed in marrying you during the noviciate, in a year from to-morrow you will be a professed nun, and I shall go down to the tomb in peace, after bequeathing all my wealth to the hospitals of Rioja. What have you to say now?'

"'That to-morrow I will go to the convent,' answered Soledad, kissing her father.

—"The Riojan was not well on the following day, nor was he able to leave his bed when he attempted to do so, nor was he ever able to rise from it again, as I have already said; but certain it is that after this conversation he grew considerably better; so much so, that the very physicians who had ordered the last sacraments to be administered to him, declared that he was out of immediate danger, and that he might even live for a considerable time

longer, unless he should take a turn for the worse. As for Soledad, needless to say that on the following day she entered the convent. Father and daughter were cut after the same pattern!

"People formed their own opinions with regard to the mental reservations of La Dolorosa, whom even we here believed to be actuated by the hope that her father would die before the year and a day were over, and that she was resolved in no case to become a nun, which would be to close up every avenue, even that of adultery, to Manuel Venegas——"

"Mirabel! I never heard you talk in that way before!" interrupted Doña Tecla. "That is going beyond all bounds!"

"Because I never had any occasion to speak to you about psychology or physiology," answered the academician. "But the marchioness understands me——"

"Come, come, my friend," said the guest, "Doña Tecla is right. Let those problems alone, and relieve my anxiety at once! Come quickly to the denouement."

"You are very amiable, Luisita, not to protest against these interruptions, which I profoundly deplore, although, indeed, to be just, they do honor to the chastity of my estimable wife," replied Don Trajano, giving the final blow to the poor woman with this crushing compliment, which drew from the Madridlenian—not included in the flattery—an indefinable smile. "I was saying, then," continued the

undaunted oracle, "that things had taken this turn, when, a few days after Soledad had entered the convent (see what human destinies are!), there arrived in the town another Riojan, bringing a letter of introduction to Don Elias, to the end that the latter might assist him with his advice and his excellent connections to establish, at the foot of the neighboring Sierra, a cloth factory to be worked by water power.

"The newcomer, who was called Don Antonio Arregui, was a man of about thirty; of fine presence; very circumspect and correct in his behavior; little given to unprofitable talk; wealthy, although much less so than the usurer; of unexceptionable sentiments, although not very brilliant in expressing them, and entirely devoted to work and to business. Add to this that he was a bachelor.

"Don Elias had found his man! He began, then, by offering him the hospitality of his house; he set in motion all his debtors that they might aid and protect the stranger in so far as he required; he presented to him, as a countryman and an old friend of his parents, the ground necessary for the factory; he made him go to the convent on several afternoons to visit his beautiful daughter, giving him messages and commissions for her; and when he judged that the good manufacturer was ready to fall spontaneously into the snare which he was about to spread for him, he recounted to him one day, with consummate cunning, what he called 'the cares of his old age and the misfortunes of his house, that had pros-

trated him on this bed of sickness, and that would soon put an end to him; in other words, the history of the horrible pressure which a mad fellow, called the Child of the Ball (his own language), was exerting on him and on his poor daughter, because they were weak, and there was no arm to defend them in all that selfish town, where to be a stranger was an unpardonable crime—a pressure which had reached the point of preventing the girl from marrying very estimable persons, and obliging her, at last, to determine to become a nun, without having any vocation for the life of the cloister, but as the only means of escaping from her ridiculous and dangerous position. ‘All this,’ said Don Elias, in conclusion, ‘because of the servile terror in which a whole town, a city of twelve thousand inhabitants, is held by the criminal threats of a species of highwayman, of whose whereabouts no one has had any knowledge for several years past, and who has probably already ended his life on a gallows.’

“Arregui, who was a Riojan and of Navarrese ancestry, besides, and in whose serene soul there was consequently no room for the superstitious observances and terrors that impress so strongly an Andalusian imagination (I too am an Andalusian, my dear Luisita; but of Portuguese descent), was amazed by what he heard, made inquiries among sensible persons, and convinced himself that it was all true; and as, on the other hand, he had been captivated by the beauty, affability, and discretion of La Dolorosa, from the first visit he made her, not

comprehending how so enchanting a creature, destined to inherit several millions, should bury herself alive within the four walls of a convent, he went a few days later to the old man's bedside and said to him with his accustomed gravity:

"I am not a professional bully, but I fear no man, especially when right is on my side, and I can rely upon the protection of the law and the authorities. Neither am I rich, compared to you, but my wants are so few, that, with the fortune I possess and my own industry, I have more than enough to make it unnecessary for me to covet other people's money. What I do desire, as your compatriot, grateful for all your kindness, and deeply enamored of your beautiful daughter, is to put an end to the shameful tyranny which oppresses this house! I have the honor, then, to ask you for the hand of Soledad, without despising or defying, but also without in any degree fearing, the threats of the famous Child of the Ball.'

"Don Elias clasped Antonio Arregui in his arms; he kissed his hands and face; he called him his dear and beloved son; he shed tears of gratitude and joy, and then called his martyred wife, who had heard him from behind the door, and ordered her to go at once to the convent and bring their daughter home; but first to embrace her son-in-law.

"Señá María Josefa had for many days past foreseen this blow, and even desired it; for it was harder for the poor mother to live without the sole treasure of her heart, and to think that at the end of the

year of her novitiate she would be lost to her forever, than to brave the disasters which this marriage might occasion, on the return, for many people improbable, but for her certain, of the dreaded Manuel Venegas. What the unfortunate mother desired was that her daughter should be always with her, that she should not be taken away from her, that she should not remain buried in a cloister! She embraced the manufacturer, then, with a certain feeling of joy, endeavoring to silence the presentiments that filled her heart with ominous forebodings, and flew to bring home Soledad, whom she had not seen—since the previous afternoon.

“For want of the necessary data I am unable to describe with exactness the scenes that took place in Don Elias’ bedroom after the young girl’s return from the convent. Señá María Josefa has been very diplomatic on this point, and has confined herself to saying that the prayers, the tears, and the commands of the extenuated father, who reminded her, almost from the tomb, of her promise to obey him, threatening her with God’s curse and his own (at this colloquy Don Antonio Arregui did not assist), together with the dignified and noble attitude taken afterward by the worthy manufacturer, whose serious countenance expressed a love which did not shrink from death, but which would bow humbly to the slightest caprice of his gentle mistress (*Improbe amor! quid non mortalia pectora cogit?*), at last determined La Dolorosa to sacrifice the gratuitous hopes of Manuel Venegas, ‘to whom’ (the words

have been transmitted to us by her mother) 'she had promised nothing, and to whom she had never even spoken a single word.'

"The sphynx, then, pronounced the longed-for yes, and pronounced it, truth to say, to the great wonder and terror of the whole town, ourselves included. She pronounced it very calmly and courageously, according to some; at the cost of a terrible convulsion, according to others. Certain it is that she pronounced it, the romantic school notwithstanding, and that, *ipso facto*, Antonio Arregui ascended the throne of this turbulent town, vacant since the departure of the Child of the Ball.

"There were not wanting those who said at the time—and I believed it—that the artful and mysterious girl controlled herself until her betrothed had departed, on the following day, for the works of the factory, and that then it was that she was seized with so violent an attack of nerves that she was thought to be dying for several hours—in spite of which, no sooner was she informed that Antonio had returned, than she recovered her self-control and appeared before him, calm, tranquil, and even smiling. These are phenomena, my dear Luisita, which may serve to explain ulterior conflicts in many marriages; as, for example, the sudden unfaithfulness of many a woman who has married willingly, apparently, but who has cherished, notwithstanding, in her breast, an inextinguishable passion for another, destined, viper-like, one day to sting the heart and the honor of the trust-

ing husband. But I should be guilty of levity inconsistent with my character if I were to venture on judgments or prejudgments on this point, and in the present case judgments which would be all the more rash, as nothing real or positive is, or has ever been known, regarding the sentiments of La Dolorosa, and I prefer to go back simply and solely to my plain and exact narration.

"I shall say, then, in the fewest words possible, so as not to tire the patience of the company, that the banns were published a few weeks after the marriage had been arranged; that, while they were being read, all eyes were fixed on the door of the church, in the expectation of seeing the Child of the Ball enter, with the solemn and tragic bearing of the bridegroom in Lucia, to give the lie to, and strangle the honest priest who announced these nuptials; that, fortunately, neither this scandal nor any other untoward event occurred, and that in this way, the day appointed for the wedding came at last, as everything in this world does come.

"The wedding, I have said, but there was no wedding. The marriage ceremony was performed at night, in the sick room of Don Elias, whose life was again in great danger, but who would not consent to postpone the marriage for a single hour. No one was present on the occasion but the parish priest and the witnesses, of whom I was one, and would that I had not been one, to be present at the horrors that were to take place there! No sooner was the nuptial ceremony ended, and while the

bride was succoring her mother, who had fallen in a faint on the floor, than a deep sigh was heard to proceed from the bed, which had formerly been that of the father of the Child of the Ball, and lying in which Don Elias Perez had just given away the bride, and we saw that the usurer was in the last agony! Almost before the priest had time to read the prayers for the dying, in the very book from which, a short time before, he had read the epistle of Paul to the bride and groom, Don Elias expired, and—oh, miserable humanity! oh, irony of fate! oh, lesson of destiny! the same candles that had been lighted to serve as the Hymenal torches of the sacrificed daughter, were the funeral tapers that lighted the bed of death of the tyrannical father who was the cause of the conflict in which so many and such feeling hearts find themselves to-day."

Don Trajano Pericles wiped the perspiration from his brow, as he concluded this sublime effort of eloquence, in which, without intending it, he had rendered a certain homage to romanticism, and then added, by way of tribute to classicism:

"Nine months later Soledad gave birth to a beautiful boy."

"God bless us!" the Madridlenian could not help exclaiming. "Well, I declare myself an ardent partisan of the Child of the Ball. Right is on his side. Soledad has no heart; she never had a heart."

"I think that you confound terms," answered Don Trajano. "What Soledad has not is the heart of the heroine of a novel, and much less a man's

heart. Her heart is purely and simply a woman's heart."

"She has a screw loose somewhere!" said Doña Tecla, smiling significantly at her guests, as if asking their indulgence for her husband.

"Well, then, let us say that she has *a woman's heart that cannot love*," said the Madridlenian.

"Say, rather," replied Don Trajano, "*a heart that can love up to a certain point*. I will not deny that Soledad always loved Manuel Venegas. More—now that my wife is not listening to us—I even think she loves him still. But the usurer's daughter was not born for a heroine; she was not born to be her own protector; she was born to be protected or ruled by others. She had counted, no doubt, on the dreaded Child of the Ball's vanquishing all who were hostile to his love, her father, as well as the suitors who might present themselves. She resembled those princesses of Eastern tales, who allow themselves to be bestowed as a prize on that one of the rival competitors for her hand who first succeeds in deciphering some charade or enigma, and marry him, however little he may be to their taste. Undoubtedly our princess, that is to say, La Dolorosa, would have preferred that Manuel should prove the conqueror. Undoubtedly she loved him. But the poor fellow was neglectful; the poor fellow delayed too long in returning from the Indies; the poor fellow had not counted on strangers, like Antonio Arregui, little affected by vague threats, coming to the town, and the obedient girl, with more or less regret, and with

better or worse mental reservations, allowed herself to be conquered and led by Don Elias, by the manufacturer, by chance, by fate, although with the condition of having things her own way afterward. Thus, in all times, have the women created by God acted, if not those created or counterfeited by novelists and poets! Thus did our first mother act in the garden of Eden, when, as we read in Genesis——”

Fortunately, at this juncture a knock was heard at the street door; otherwise, Heaven only knows what a scourging the jurisconsult would have given to the poor daughters and granddaughters of Eve, including the most beautiful of those who figure in history!

“There is Pepito!” exclaimed the cousin of the marquis. “He will bring us the latest news.”

The first assertion proved to be correct; not so the second. Pepito indeed entered the apartment, holding himself very straight and stiff, to make himself appear taller, and saluted everybody, although he saw only the Madridlenian, as the moth sees only the flame. But as for news, alas, such information as he brought was either negative or doubtful.

It was to be gathered from it, in substance, that Manuel Venegas had not yet entered the town, nor did anyone know anything of his whereabouts; that Don Trinidad Muley, tired of scouring the country in search of him, and being obliged to rise early on the following morning for the great function of the day (a mass and sermon with the Blessed Sacrament exposed, general communion, etc., etc.), had retired

to sleep a few moments before; that the house of Antonio Arregui, situated in a different quarter from that of the now uninhabited palace of the Venegases, was dark and silent as a tomb, but not so the house which had been prepared as a dwelling for the Child of the Ball, through the open windows of which could be seen many lights, as if a dead body lay there in state; and, finally, that even the watchmen, the only persons now in the streets, feared that on the following afternoon some catastrophe would happen during the procession of the real Child of the Ball, at which none of the three principal personages of the drama would fail to be present—Sole-dad, for the sake of appearances, so that it might not be said that she had been affected by the return of her former lover; Manuel Venegas, to convert into deeds his oaths and threats of former days, and Antonio Arregui, lest it should be thought that he had fled and he should be branded as a coward. That is to say—all three, through regard for the public.

“We must go to see that procession!” the Madridlenian at once exclaimed.

“I secured balconies for the purpose, long before we ever thought of these disturbances,” answered Don Trajano. “We will go to the house of one of my laborers——”

“I will not fail to be there!” said the eyes of Pepito, who could not conceive that Manuel Venegas could be more interesting than a son of the Muses,

"And we must go also on the day after to-morrow to the raffle," continued the Madridlenian. "The Child of the Ball cannot fail to be there in order to fulfill his oath to dance with La Dolorosa. I am longing to see them both!"

"Count upon one of the principal boxes; in other words, the cave of the steward of the Brotherhood," answered Don Trajano, bowing to the cousin of the marquis.

And at this instant the musical clock in the reception room struck eleven. The company rose simultaneously, and bade one another good-by until they should meet the following afternoon, at the procession, with which the Madridlenian retired to her room to dream of—I know not what money-lenders in Madrid; Pepito went to his garret to compose amorous verses to the Madridlenian; the mute and nameless guests went away to rest from the fatigue of having been born, and the eloquent Señor de Mirabel fell under the secular authority of his wife.

Let us rest, also, for this purpose bringing our Third Book to a close.

Book IV.

THE BATTLE.

CHAPTER I.

VITRIOL'S HEADQUARTERS.

THE memorable Sunday at last dawned on which was to begin the rude battle of thirty-six hours which was to be waged between Good and Evil around Manuel Venegas, but above all within his tortured breast; an obstinate and disastrous battle, in which all the inhabitants of the town—in other words, all the members of the grand jury which we call the public—were to take a more or less direct and justifiable part.

Vitriol had given orders to his followers on the preceding night to assemble at reveillé, at the door of the shop; and there, in fact, had been standing since dawn, the persons whom at an earlier period of this history we called "uncultured young men, although possessed of some learning in matters sufficiently delicate," of whom the druggist's clerk was apostle and chief.

There were also in this common center of news (on this morning an excellent hiding-place from

which to observe the proceedings of Manuel Venegas, whose domicile was situated on the same square) many other persons differing in age, class, and rank, all very eager to hear or to tell the latest news relative to the dreadful events which *could be seen approaching, which were inevitable, which were awaited with impatience,* even—and which everybody would denounce, and which the authorities would take active measures to punish, the moment they were consummated. Even the servants, on their way to market, joined this large open-air meeting, and took a part in the conversation, indicating what each one of the personages ought to do, "if they were honorable people, and had any sense of shame." The most dishonest and disreputable were the fiercest and most implacable, and they repeated, word for word, the oaths and threats which the Child of the Ball had uttered eight years before, terminating all their harangues with the sacramental phrase: "Now we shall see if there are any men!"

The Alcalde himself, a very worthy person, debated there with the greatest seriousness, whether Manuel would kill Antonio on that afternoon or would defer doing so until the raffle on the following day, inclining to the belief that the former was what would happen. A familiar of the bishop, a simple deacon still, although he was past middle age, but who was beginning to enjoy the reputation of being a great theologian, had drawn near the assembly, as if by chance, and lost not a word of what was said, without himself opening his lips. In

short, even our old friend, the retired captain, who had offered two months' pay to Manuel Venegas on the afternoon of the famous raffle, was among the curious, in spite of his seventy-eight winters, and his glorious infirmities.

The only one wanting to complete the meeting was its natural president, the master of the house, the illustrious Vitriol, who had been shut up for the past half hour in the back shop with a sort of witch, a former debtor of Don Elias Perez, who had been ruined by him, and who now lived as an inmate in Soledad's house; the same woman, we believe, who had come to the shop the night before for medicines for Señá María Josefa. The followers of the apothecary, guessing something, no doubt, of the important matters that might be under discussion in this secret interview, took good care not to interrupt it, explaining their master's absence, on the contrary, to the rest of the assemblage, by saying that he was compounding an infernally troublesome medicine for the sacristan of a neighboring village. Vitriol, finally, had been seen to go into the shop and take some money out of the drawer, and while he was doing this everyone fancied that he looked more ugly, more sallow, and more excited than usual.

Meantime, much interesting information had been given, and repeated, and commented upon to satiety, at the door of the establishment. It was learned, for instance, that Manuel Venegas had at last entered his house early that morning, his horse jaded, he himself with torn clothes, and without a

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hat, as if he had just returned from some terrible combat; that this combat must have been with himself, however, for some irrigators had seen him galloping about aimlessly through the plantations outside the town, and through distant olive groves and vineyards, as if he were pursued by invisible phantoms; that he had encountered the rural guards, and had first horsewhipped them and then given them money, when they had remonstrated with him about the havoc he was making; the listeners relating in their turn the history of all that had occurred in the town during his absence, and in addition the fact that as soon as he had left his horse in the stable, he had gone out again on foot enveloped in a long cloak, directing his steps toward the quarter of San Gil, where the watchmen had seen him walking up and down before the silent dwelling of Antonio Arregui, and even knocking at the street door (how dreadful!), no one inside answering his repeated knocks (what a shame!), until, almost at daybreak, he had returned to his house and entered it; when all the doors and windows were immediately closed, and had so remained up to this time.

"How dreadful!" and "What a shame!" were involuntary exclamations, the former of the theologian, the latter of the captain.

In support of the opinion of the latter, although with little opportuneness, a *pater familias* then added:

"What is there to surprise you in that, gentlemen? Antonio Arregui is a great coward, who was

afraid to spend last night in his house, or even in the town; Antonio Arregui fled shamefully yesterday afternoon when he learned of the arrival of the Child of the Ball! I myself saw him riding up the left bank of the river, at about half past four, and he certainly looked furious."

"And you may add," said a servant maid, "that up to this hour he has not returned! I have just come from the market, and he was not there, as he usually is in the morning, buying the day's provision for his operatives in the Sierra."

"Gentlemen, let us be just!" exclaimed a merchant from Burgos. "Antonio Arregui is incapable of running away! If he left the town yesterday afternoon, it was because he had received information that the trenches, which supply the water-power for the fulling mills of his factory, had been broken down in several places—by some evil-disposed person, no doubt. But at that hour no one in the town knew that the Child of the Ball was in this neighborhood."

"Don Trinidad Muley knew it! Señá María Josefa knew it!" cried several citizens at once.

"Well, he did not know it!" replied the merchant. "I saw him setting out, and all he was thinking about was his ruined trenches. In short, I lay a double against a single dollar that, as soon as he has learned what has happened, we shall have him back again in the town, resolved not to allow himself to be conquered by anyone. I know the Riojans!"

The conversation was beginning to take a danger-

ous turn, and an old man, a bun-seller by occupation, seeing this to be the case, touched another key very opportunely, saying that that morning, before sunrise, Don Trinidad Muley had been knocking for more than half an hour at the door of his former ward's house, without receiving any answer, which showed that Manuel, before retiring a short time previously, must have given orders to Basilia (Polonia's sister) not to open to or answer anyone, even if they should break down the door.

"I am delighted!" a disciple of Vitriol said in an undertone to his companions, on hearing this. "For so that ignorant fanatic has not been able to frighten Don Rodrigo's son with his litanies, as he frightened him on the famous afternoon of the raffle. I am afraid that the Infant Jesus of Santa María de la Cabeza is going to play too important a part in this affair of honor! The priests never let slip an opportunity of adding to the fame of their saints or of doing a stroke of business!"

The bun-seller had meantime gone on to relate that Don Trinidad Muley, tired of knocking in vain, had returned sadly to his house, after expressing his regret to everyone he met, that the great functions which would require him to be at his church that day would keep him from *preventing* his dear Manuel from taking any false step, saying in feeling accents: "I trust in God and in the Virgin that the pious souls of the town will supply my place for those few hours."

"Preventing!" another disciple of Vitriol had

ventured to say aloud. "That is contrary to liberty! I recognize there the apostolic language, which is incompatible with the present Constitution, however much pre-censure may be to the taste of the present ministry!"

All the bystanders laughed at this irrelevant sally, with the exception of the captain, who contemptuously muttered a few unintelligible words, and the familiar of the bishop, who now thought it indispensable to disseminate here some moral and pacific maxims, and lamented as well as he could—he was a Biscayan, like his lordship, and spoke Castilian very badly—"that so grave a danger should threaten Señor Don Antonio Arregui, when he was so happy in his married life, when he was so contented with his factory, to which he was often to be seen going, accompanied by his wife, his child, and his mother-in-law, when the so-called Dolorosa showed so much affection and respect for him, and when a certain influential Regidor, grateful for the important benefits which the rich manufacturer had conferred upon the town, had just offered him the alcalde's wand for the coming year."

At this moment Vitriol appeared at the door of his shop. The hag had slipped away by the door of the yard.

All the youths gathered around the master, not with veneration or affection, but with a cynical familiarity which verged on mockery, greeting him with a volley of salutations.

"Good-morning, Licorice!"

"Good-morning, Spatula!"

"Good-morning, Panacea!"

"Good-morning, Simple Cerate!"

"Good-morning, Papaveris-Albis!"

All these and many other names were given to the apothecary's clerk, but the public in general preferred to call him Vitriol.

"Good-morning, ~~rabble~~!" answered the enemy of God, looking at the insolent striplings with a forbidding smile on his ugly and unclean mouth.

And he neither saluted the rest of the concourse, nor was he saluted by them. There could not be greater familiarity nor more mutual contempt on all sides.

Vitriol was twenty-eight years old, but he looked to be forty, so wrinkled was his skin, so bald his forehead, so decayed his teeth, so scant his sight. Without being a monster—which would have awakened compassion—while human in shape, and lacking no sense or member, he was one of the ugliest beings whom God ever created. The obliquity of his eyes irritated the nerves, his smile offended, even when it was not mocking or sarcastic, and his quince-colored complexion, his lusterless hair, like that of a dead man, as well as his total neglect in the matters of cleanliness and good breeding, excited nausea. He had enormous hands and feet, legs slightly bowed, a sunken chest, a disagreeable voice, and a foul breath. It seemed, in addition, as if his clothes had been selected by some enemy, for his yellow dress and his green necktie could not be

more unsuited than they were to the hue of his face, although this was covered with stains and patches of various colors caused by all sorts of salves and ointments. Such was the audacious personage who had aspired to the hand of La Dolorosa, after Manuel Venegas left the town, and before Antonio Arregui appeared in it; such was the missionary of atheism in this town of baptized Moors; such was the intelligent clerk of the best pharmacy in the place, whose owner and proprietor resided almost always in the country; such was the villain of our drama.

No sooner did the bishop's familiar observe him than he brought his pacific discourse to a close, and turned to go away; but Vitriol, who noticed this, exclaimed in his discordant and mocking tones:

Go on, Señor Don Carmelo! Why do you stop at seeing me? Were you prophesying, as you prophesied last night, the miracles which the real Child of the Ball is going to perform this afternoon in the procession? Last night I did not answer you because I had a pain in my stomach; but to-day I must tell you that the real Child of the Ball is more of a fraud than the false one, and consequently less able to work miracles. Imagine, comrades, that the venerated image of this Child is made of oak wood, and that once, when the hand in which he holds the world was broken off, the carpenter next door mended it for a peseta."

"This is not to be endured!" muttered the captain, asking for a chair and seating himself in the

midst of the chorus. "I don't know what brings one here to listen to such insolent and stupid speeches!"

"You are right. I am going away," said the Alcalde. "It compromises one to be seen in the company of these infidels. Come, Martin."

And he went into the town hall.

"You see?" the person called Martin—a disciple of Vitriol's, and very noticeable from the newness and modernness of his attire—observed to his chief. "You see? The Señor Alcalde has been obliged to retire. You go too far in your blasphemies!"

"There speaks a Judas!" cried the apothecary. "I told you so last night, comrades. Martin has deserted us! Since he was appointed clerk to the town council he has become a devotee. He must be expelled from our society! The day least expected we shall see him beating his breast in the churches."

"I am no devotee, nor shall I ever become one!" answered Martin, greatly annoyed. "What happens with me and with all your other friends is that, as we are not so ugly as you are, we do not hate God as bitterly, and we forget your impious teachings. I mean by this that, in my opinion, you belong to the most detestable class of infidels known. You have not become one through romantic sentimentalism, like some of the poets, nor as a result of spontaneous and calm philosophical reasoning, like the respectable French authors, many of them upright and prosperous men, whom we have read together,

such as Volney, Voltaire, Diderot, etc., but purely and simply because you are excessively ugly and wicked, from lack of enjoyments or of resignation, from natural venomousness like the venomousness of certain reptiles and beasts. In a word—if you had not been born so ugly, you would, before this, have had a sweetheart, whom perhaps you would have married, and who knows but that you would be now the best, the most indulgent, the most optimistic, and the most religious father in the town! But, my dear fellow, you are so horribly ugly, and you must suffer so acutely from never having met a woman who would listen to you, that—well! I can understand how it is that you are not grateful to your Creator, and that you do not love your neighbor as yourself."

"Creator! Creator!" answered Vitriol with bitter irony. "This is the first time I have ever heard you utter that word! Boys, I repeat that he turned traitor to us when they gave him that mess of potage! Paco Antunez, you have arrived very opportunely. You, who are my best disciple, my right hand, my strong arm, my secular arm, you will close the door of the temple—that is to say, of the back shop—to this gentleman clerk, who now smokes tobacco of his own!"

"It matters nothing to me not to come back here," replied the ill-used disciple, "and you will soon see that all these unwary youths, whom you are corrupting with your doctrines, will leave you one by one." As for the rest, know, gentlemen, that

if Vitriol hates La Dolorosa so bitterly it is only because he was in love with her, and she gave him the mitten—or something worse than the mitten!"

"That is a lie!" shouted the apothecary furiously. "It was entirely the other way! I refused her when Don Elias offered her to me, weighed down with gold! But everybody knows that I am Don Antonio Arregui's friend, and that his mother-in-law sends here for all her medicines. Consequently what you have just said is a vile calumny."

"Well, then, there comes the man who told it to me this morning," answered Martin, pointing to our Pepito, who at this moment appeared in sight from behind an arch of the Plaza.

"That man? And who is he? Ah, Pepito! another Judas! Another deserter like yourself! He, too, used to attend our meetings, and he was one of the fiercest denouncers of the apostolic party. You will see how he will pass by without stopping, or even casting a glance this way. He is coming, I suppose, to pay his court to the bishop, to see if he will make him a sacristan. Señor Don Carmelo, tell his lordship that from me. Tell him that Pepito does not believe in God. But see, how fine he looks this morning! Of course. He does not even salute us! Was there ever such a puppy! No doubt he is on his way to beg a situation from the guest of the Spanish-Frenchman, that twentieth cousin of a counterfeit marquis, whose title is not to be found in the Foreigner's Guide."

"Be quiet," whispered Paco Antuñez, a hand-

some, honest-looking, clean and attractive young man, although he was no less of a republican and free-thinker than Vitriol. "You will disgust everybody."

"I won't be quiet, I am tired of suffering!" replied the personal enemy of his Creator and his fellow-creatures. "See how that little clerk has been heaping abuse upon me, merely because I said that the Infant Jesus was made of wood. And he is made of wood! And if, instead of a silver cross, they had put an iron spike on the ball which he carries in his hand, we should have the world converted into a top."

"Our insignificant world is not in truth much larger than a top, if we compare it with the greatness and the power of God," said the theologian gravely, thinking the turn the debate had taken favorable to his desire of getting a hearing. "If the world and man are not made of wood they are made of clay—and they were created out of nothing, as the Holy Scriptures tells us. The power and the holiness of that wooden Child, and of the cross displayed on that top, consist in the moral teachings which they commemorate; in the help they give in controlling anger, in moderating concupiscence, in humanizing man——"

"And your motive in talking that way," interrupted Vitriol, "consists in the fact that you have been the bishop's barber ever since his lordship was a poor parish priest in Biscay."

"And I take pride in the fact," answered the

familiar, restraining, by his dignified bearing, the laughter of some, and the gestures of repugnance and indignation of others. "It is very true that I continue to shave my master and father, who took me out of poverty, when the civil war reduced all my family to beggary. But that does not prevent me—me—who would be fully capable of strangling you with my own hands, if my religious principles did not prevent me, from asking God, with my whole heart, to have pity upon you in the hour of death."

"Well said, Señor Priest!" cried the captain. "Give me that hand!"

"Carlist phrases! Apostolic strategems!" returned the apothecary. "All roads lead to Rome!"

"I should speak and act in the same way," answered the theologian, "if I were a Jew, a Moor, or a Protestant. No, I do not now defend any particular religion; I defend religion in the abstract, the fear of God, the love of man. In short, I forgive you—and I leave you. Your eyes will one day be opened!"

Vitriol was conscious that he had come off badly in the argument, and he made an effort to detain the deacon, saying to him precipitately:

"You defend darkness. You defend fanaticism and the Inquisition. You defend lying, practiced as a means of tyrannizing over and exploiting men! We philosophers, on the contrary, defend the rights of reason, the cause of truth, the emancipation of the intellect, the dignity of the human species.

We do not desire that anyone should live in a delusion, or accept submissively the inequalities of fortune, in the hope of another life and of a Heaven which do not exist, which cannot exist, whose existence would be contrary to logic, as is demonstrated by the celebrated dilemma of Epicurus——”

But the theologian was out of hearing, for he had indeed gone away, leaving the pharmacist the last word.

The majority of the crowd, particularly the more respectable persons, had gradually dispersed, renouncing the boasted advantages of becoming converted to atheism, so that the club was soon left to itself.

“But, man,” argued the captain, confronting Vitriol, “supposing all those vile things you say to be true, how do you better matters by giving us such bad news? What do you lose if I, in the midst of my rheumatism, my enforced retirement, the delays in my pay, and the vexation of knowing many more such wretches as yourself, should find consolation in the hope of making somewhere else a more successful campaign than I have made in this poor life? I deceive myself, you will say? Well, leave me my sweet illusions. Don’t ply the devil’s trade! Attend to your ointments, and leave us with our saints—of wood—for they too serve us for medicine!”

“A fine way to reason!” answered the apothecary. “It is easily seen that you are no lover of the truth, and that you have never looked at even the outside of a book. You soldiers have always been obscurantist, intolerant, servile!”

"Go to the devil!" answered the captain rising. "I am not servile! I am more liberal than you are! I have fought against Napoleon and against Angoulême. I shed my blood in defense of independence and of the liberty of my country, until, on account of old age and ill health, I was retired. But I am still able—— But I don't want to grow angry. As I said before, I commit a folly in coming here. You are all a set of infidels, of Lutherans, of unruly youngsters, who ought to be in jail! But—what is to be done? So goes the world! Well, good-by, boys! It is eight o'clock, and I am going to see if I can get some breakfast."

The veteran's apostrophe was received by the youths with shouts of laughter and jests, and, as the few persons of respectability belonging to the chorus who still remained followed him, the others went into the shop, where the master, in consideration of the peculiarity of the circumstances, allowed them to put their hands into the licorice drawer, and even pretended not to see some of them guzzling out of the bottles of simple syrup, syrup of citron, and marshmallow syrup.

Having thus refreshed themselves, they all went home to continue breakfasting, with the exception of Paco Antuñez, to whom Vitriol said:

"Don't go away, Señor Chief of Staff. I have something to say to you."

"What's the matter?" asked the petted disciple, with a valiant air. "What does La Volanta say?"

Vitriol answered with the utmost affability:

“La Volanta is on very sure ground. You know she was a wealthy countrywoman, whose devotion to brandy caused her to fall into the clutches of the usurer, Don Elias, who brought her to beggary. Soledad and her mother support her now, rather through remorse than through charity, from whence it may be inferred that she hates them both with her whole soul. In exchange, considering that I am the consulting advocate of the poor; that I do not attend mass, and that I compound for her, gratis, certain ointments which she uses in her trades of healer and sorceress, she loves me with all her heart, she looks upon me as a sort of Vicar of the Devil, the only God in whom she believes, and she keeps me informed of all that goes on in the house of La Dolorosa. Now, then, through this reliable channel I have obtained the information that Señá María Josefa it was who sent a man to ruin the great trench of the factory the night before last, when she learned that Manuel Venegas was coming back; in that way obliging Antonio Arregui to go to the place, and so gaining time to communicate with the cheated lover. La Volanta herself found the man who broke down the trench, and she promised me, last night, that she would get the same, or some other man, to go for me to-day to the factory, as if by chance, and inform Antonio Arregui of the return of the Child of the Ball. Six reals I gave her for the service!”

“It is three leagues going and three returning—it was not too much!” said Paco Antuñez, phleg-

matically, lighting a thick stick of what was then called "black tobacco."

"It was not too much," replied Vitriol. "But the trouble is that none of the men to whom La Volanta has proposed the business would venture to go to the Sierra, fearing lest the Child of the Ball should hear of it. You see what a contrariety! It is eight o'clock, and it is necessary that La Dolorosa's husband should be here before the procession starts!"

"The procession starts at four," observed Antuñez coldly, puffing the poison he held between his lips.

"Would you venture to go?" asked Vitriol, affecting the utmost indifference.

"Not I!" answered the disciple immediately, with a gravity unbecoming his twenty-two years.

"You can pretend that you are hunting," insisted Vitriol. "Take your horse and your gun, and in two hours you will be there. Arregui could not suspect that you had gone on purpose to give him life news."

"I have said that I will not go," replied Antuñez, watching the smoke wreaths of his cigar.

"Do you fear that Manuel Venegas might hear of it? Are you, too, afraid of the Child of the Ball?"

"It is not that, friend Vitriol; I am afraid of you; your ferocity terrifies me. Whatever may be my religious ideas, or, to speak more correctly, although you have left me with none, I was not born to stab by another's hand; I am not, like you, indifferent to morality and law; I love virtue, although I do not believe in another life; I am a real republican."

"I know it—and you are wrong," answered Vitriol. "The best thing is to be nothing."

Antuñez answered quickly:

"To speak in that way one must have begun as you began, by hating the human race. Now, I do not hate it; I love mankind, and I desire their happiness, as Cato, Brutus, and Robespierre desired it."

"Well, then, pretend to be a Christian!" said Vitriol laughing. "In that way you can offer two blessings to your adored fellow-beings—one a present and the other a future one, one in this life and the other—where sacristans count."

"I cannot say what I do not feel," answered the philanthropist, "and it is precisely for that reason that I refuse to go to deceive Antonio Arregui, concealing from him the object of my excursion to his factory."

"But you forget what we said last night!" exclaimed Vitriol anxiously. "You forget that if Don Trinidad Muley arranges this business, mystical ideas will win the victory. The clergy will declare, and the old women will repeat what they say, that there has been a miracle, as they declared in 1832, when Manuel Venegas spared the life of Don Elias Perez, on the day of the famous raffle. Don Bernardino, the sacristan of the parish, said afterward that if a murder was not committed at the time, it was because Don Trinidad clung to the image of the Child of the Sweet Name, imploring his assistance. More: Señá Polonia, the housekeeper—or the mistress of the priest—(don't frown; I am willing to

admit that she is only his housekeeper), availed herself of the occasion to make the absurd statement that that same image, the devoted protector of Don Rodrigo's son, restored his speech to him when he was a boy. All this is very serious! Antuñez! either we are, or we are not, the enemies of superstition! Your cause and mine are the same, although I am neither a republican nor a monarchist! Such ridiculous fables must be exploded! Don Trinidad Muley must be prevented from obtaining a fresh triumph!"

"Undeceive yourself, Vitriol," answered the republican coolly. "What influences you in this undertaking is not philosophy, to which I, too, yield fervent homage, but the insensate love which you had for La Dolorosa, converted into deadly hatred by her having obliged a dog to swallow your ardent declaration. Last night I was ignorant of that amusing incident, but I learned of it this morning, like all the town, through the Spanish-Frenchman having related it last night to his guests."

Vitriol writhed convulsively, and gave vent to a sort of howl. Then he straightened himself and said with sorrowful meekness:

"I will not deny to you, who are the apple of my eye; I will not deny to you, my dear Paco, that I am also influenced in this matter by the inextinguishable hatred you speak of. I will not deny to you that La Dolorosa's felicity maddens me; that I want to see her weep as much as I have wept, and that the time has come for her to do so! But do

not therefore doubt that, at the same time that I wish to avenge myself, I wish to defend sacred impiety, the sole joy and consolation of my miserable existence! Yes, I seek to prevent the priests from making fools believe in a religious miracle, which would bring us all into ridicule. I wish to prevent our being hissed by the whole town! Don Trinidad Muley, with his charities, his meddlesomeness, and his doubtful grammar, is the priest who to-day does most injury to the cause of reason in this town. We must fight a pitched battle with him! We must rout him forever!"

"On that point you are repeating my own words, if not as regards Don Trinidad himself (who is a good man without either guile or genius), with respect to the real apostolic party. But, between combating error and doing what you now ask me to do; between preaching one's philosophical ideas and leading a worthy man to the slaughter, there is a great, a very great difference. I repeat that I will not go to the Sierra."

"Don't go, then!" exclaimed Vitriol, with supreme contempt. "I will be able to manage without you."

"Will you go yourself to look for Arregui?" asked Paco Antuñez ironically.

"If I could shut up the shop I would do so! But I am alone, and I cannot stir from here either day or night. But know that I am the only man in the town who is not afraid of the Child of the Ball."

"I have heard you make that same remark two or

three times already. Will you explain what you mean by it?"

"There is very little to explain. I am not afraid of him, because I am a coward!"

And as he said this Vitriol drew himself up proudly.

"You have uttered a great truth!" exclaimed Antuñez. "The world is the patrimony of those who do not fight, or, rather, of those who do not fight openly. No one runs less risk than a coward. The contempt of the brave serves him as a shield. In short—settle the matter to suit yourself! With your permission, I will retire."

The apothecary heaved a deep sigh, and murmured, as if speaking to himself:

"There are few perfect natures!"

"Few, indeed!" returned Antuñez.

"But after all, as your leader, I have some authority!"

"Yes, indeed—a great deal too much!"

"Are you dissatisfied?" asked the pharmacist quickly. "Do you intend to leave me?"

"Yes; but it is because I am going to breakfast," answered the chief disciple, smiling with an undefinable expression.

And he went away very slowly, leaving Vitriol plunged in painful meditation.

The scenes of the rest of the morning were, so to say, an amplification of the one which we witnessed at the door of the pharmacy. As soon as the neigh-

borhood had finished breakfasting, the Plaza was once more filled with groups of people, standing together talking, or moving about, as if the great festival of the day were to be celebrated here instead of in the suburb of Santa María de la Cabeza. Contrary to the long-established custom, many of the principal persons of the town, and, needless to say, all the fighting men and those who delighted in brawls and disturbances, absented themselves from the high mass which was just then being celebrated in the parish governed by Don Trinidad Muley. "What would be the use of going?" the people seemed to say to themselves, "when we know that Manuel Vencgas is shut up in that house?"

The knots of people standing here and there, then, did not remove their eyes from those closed windows, and even the passers-by looked back every instant, to see whether the dwelling of the returned wanderer showed signs of life. There was in all this something resembling the expectancy of the public assembled to witness a bull-fight, when the lovers of the sport still throng the arena, waiting for the announcement of the coming of the bull to get out of his way, and leave to others the business of confronting him. Or, rather, the situation was like that of the combatants in an ancient tournament. Manuel and Antonio were compelled, as it were, to choose between combat and dishonor. "Blood or contempt!" seemed to be the refrain of the chorus.

The dinner hour—two o'clock in the afternoon—arrived, and not so much as a mouse had yet stirred

in Venegas's abode, although Don Trinidad Muley's housekeeper had gone twice, and twice also an acolyte of the parish of Santa María, to knock at the door, and the crowd retired from the Plaza.

But before twenty minutes had elapsed several persons had already returned. (Sparing eaters they must have been or their tables very ill spread!) Others returned a little later. In addition, many went who had not been there in the morning; so that the Plaza at last presented the appearance of a busy and animated encampment. Suffice it to say that several young men, and even some very sedate persons, had already declared it to be their firm intention not to go to the procession, unless they saw that Manuel was going, but to remain where they were for the rest of the afternoon.

The general of this idle army, standing at the door of his tent—that is to say, the intrepid Vitriol, standing at the door of his shop—rubbed his hands together with satisfaction at seeing that all the town, either by commission or omission, were seconding his plan of battle, and, for better security, he gave instructions to his aids to disseminate among the crowd the ideas most conducive to the triumph of anger over patience, or, as he said, “the triumph of reason over prejudice.”

Suddenly a piece of news spread through the Plaza which caused a shuffling and a reforming of the groups into other and more numerous ones, joined even by the passers-by. Pepa, the hair-dresser, had just crossed the Plaza, and had told

someone that she had been curling Señora de Arregui's hair in ringlets like the Madridlenian's, and that she had that moment left her dressing herself in her gala attire, *to go to the procession with her mother!*

The commentaries on this important event had scarcely begun, when another incident occurred that raised the excitement of the crowd to its highest pitch. The door of Manuel Venegas's house opened and Basilia, his housekeeper, appeared in the doorway, and informed the public that the son of Don Rodrigo Venegas had begun to dress himself, to go also to the procession of the Child of the Ball!

The joy, the terror, and the enthusiasm of the multitude knew no bounds. The rabble even clapped their hands, and the ragamuffins ran about, whistling; which being observed by the Alcalde, fearing a riot, or something of the kind, he advised everyone, "for the honor of the town, anciently a Phœnician and Roman colony, and later the capital of one of the Moorish kings, to repair to the street in which the procession was to form, where it seemed more natural that respectable people should be assembled on this afternoon, and await there, with the quietness suited to the occasion, the arrival of their dear townsman, Manuel Venegas, who, on his side, would be glad to be allowed to leave his house quietly, like a sober and sensible man, instead of having to pass through this noisy crowd."

The excited groups allowed themselves to be per-

suaded by these arguments, and almost all of them dispersed, or rather, they walked in a body toward the parish of Santa María, whose joyous bells were already announcing that it wanted but an hour to the forming of the procession.

Let us follow the throng, and proceed also to the same retired quarter, where we shall meet again many familiar persons.

CHAPTER II.

THE PROCESSION.

IT was a beautiful and serene afternoon, and spring, dressed as an Andalusian maiden, filled the sky with smiles and light, with warm kisses the tranquil atmosphere, and with fragrant roses, not only all the gardens and balconies of the town, but also the glossy tresses of the girls, and the hands of their favored or luckless lovers.

It still wanted half an hour to the time appointed for the procession to form, and the street of Santa María de la Cabeza, at the foot of which is situated the temple of the same name, had been converted into a court of Heaven, an antechamber of Paradise, a real Empyrean—such as the descendants of Adam and Eve imagine to be and represent those celestial heights, from the narrow confines of our earth.

By this I mean to say, that all the windows had long hangings of cotton, calico, moreen, and even of damask, in which it was easy to recognize the bridal quilts of many generations, while the long street and the whole route along which the procession was to pass was carpeted with green bulrushes, yellow broom, fragrant mint, and other wild plants. The bells of Santa María rang forth joyfully, announcing that the solemn moment was now at hand. Rock-

ets exploded by dozens in the sky, as if to notify the other planets of what was taking place on ours, and the drum of the band of the National Militia gave beats and double beats, of warning and of summons, that raised the general expectation to the highest point.

All the windows and roofs, even to the sloping tiled roofs, were full of people, chiefly neat and well-dressed maid-servants, the balconies being reserved for the ladies of the center of the town, who already displayed in them their capacious mantillas or Almagro toques, French coiffures, and other distinctive marks of their high lineage.

In the streets there was not space to drop a pin, so crowded were they with artisans in new attire, laborers in clean attire, and spruce young gentlemen in fashionable attire. Even the irrigators had abandoned the fields, and were here, leaning on their spades, as if ready to return to the interrupted task as soon as they had witnessed the triumphal procession of the Christ Child. Several retired officers—among whom our captain was especially noticeable—displayed the uniforms they had worn in the War of Independence, and it was indeed a pleasing sight to see them, buttoned up to the chin in their high-collared coats, provided with a cloth to protect them from the perspiration, which reached to the crown of the head, with the broad fringeless or the long fringed epaulets standing on their shoulders, the stiff whalebone stock preventing them from looking at their fellow-creatures, and the helmet, with

its chin straps and enormous bell, that not even the god Mars himself would have been able to support! Finally, the noisy urchins and the sedate militia men (or National soldiers, as they were then called) crowded together in the porch, and on the steps of the church, to serve, the former as the van guard the latter as the escort of the image of the Infant Jesus, while the sun, now descending in the west, shot its rays through the street, and bestowed on all these things, divine, human, and childish, a glorious, triumphant, and holy character that, though it might be far from eternal beatitude, differed somewhat also from the sordid struggling of daily life.

The Madridlenian, in a black gown and white mantilla, and adorned with many jewels of little value, was seated in the principal balcony of one of the finest houses of the quarter, an enormous balcony with a chocolate-colored wooden railing, capable of containing fifteen or twenty persons. And Don Trajano was there, also, with his wife and all his circle, with the exception of our friend Pepito, who strutted up and down the street in front of the house, so that the Madridlenian might see him playing his part in the world, like a full-grown man, and admire at a distance his swallow-tail coat (made over from the only one his worthy father had ever possessed), his hazel trousers, his sky-blue cravat, his flowered waistcoat, and his colossal high hat. The poor genius looked like a monkey in masquerade!

Don Trajano Mirabel had taken the notion this

afternoon to discourse on politics, with which he had been boring another gentleman of his own age, a bitter moderate like himself, who usually formed one of his circle of visitors, but neither the latter nor anyone else had, at the present moment, any attention to bestow upon anything but a charming woman, also wearing a white mantilla, who had just seated herself in a little balcony of the *entresol* of the house opposite.

"You are fortunate," said Doña Tecla to the marquis's cousin. "We shall be looking at La Dolorosa all the afternoon! There she is—with a mantilla like yours. Heavens! See how the people are staring at her! The procession itself could not attract more attention."

And so it was. Soledad was there, where it had been least expected to see her; in a humble house; in that balcony, so dangerously near the street, almost confounded with the multitude, when she might have disposed of every house and balcony in the quarter.

"What rashness! What imprudence!" said some of the men. "To choose this spot, when the Child of the Ball is in the town, and knowing, as she does, how furious he is!"

"What a want of consideration! What barefacedness!" added some of the women. "To go holiday-making when her husband is away, knowing that the *other* intends to come here!"

"We must acknowledge that she is very brave!" answered the more tolerant. "She takes the bull

by the horns. See what a serene and beautiful countenance! See what a haughty smile! See what eyes! There is no uneasiness to be read in them! And yet, her heart must be thumping!"

"There, there is La Dolorosa!" exclaimed Don Trajano at the same moment, addressing the marquis's cousin. "This *coup* shows her to you exactly as she is. Do you know why she has come here? To disarm Manuel by her presence. To make him desire a peace which would be shameful for Antonio Arregui. To stake all on a single throw! I told you last night that Soledad loves—up to a certain point—the brave Venegas. I am old and I know what sin is——"

"You are atrocious!" answered the court lady sharply, as if the jurisconsult had surprised her traversing in her imagination, as if she were Soledad, that peaceful, criminal, and delightful path.

Presently she added, removing her eye-glasses:

"Well, I declare, that woman is better than I had imagined! Although she dresses with mediocre taste, and has a dreadfully hypocritical expression, she is very pretty, very graceful, and even very interesting."

Interesting, indeed! Let us describe her once more and for the last time. Let us tell how beautiful she, whom we knew as an innocent child and a modest girl, is now as a woman of twenty-five, a wife and mother.

Soledad did not belong to the order of Greek statues. Her beauty was rather of the Gothic than

the pagan type, was more romantic than classic, resembled more the creations of Schiller than of Ovid, had more of the attributes, in short, of the woman than of the goddess. With all this, however, the *tout ensemble* was a marvel of grace, whose soft outlines fluctuated at times between the curve and the angle, throwing into greater relief the real charms of the woman. Nor was it the form only of that exquisite figure that was admirable; matter itself, unimportant in pagan beauty, had a charm in Soledad and spoke with a language of its own to the imagination. She was, in short, one of those delicate and nervous women (who are generally erroneously called spiritual or ideal), whose corporeal charms are not confined to the form, to the outward modeling, to the plastic beauty, as in the Olympic goddesses, but reside and are perceptible in the whole physical being, in its character and nature, in the quality of the mass, as well in what the sculptor sees of them as in what the physiologist divines; women really material and earthly, much more human than massive caryatides without magnetism, that look like models of molded clay; lithe serpents, in short, with smooth, soft skin, firm, delicate flesh, warm, fragile bones, whose blood flows swiftly, who live and delight in fire, like the fabled salamanders!

The face of La Dolorosa increased the profound interest and the keen curiosity which her languid and voluptuous form awoke in the mind. That pallor, unchanging, but full of vitality, those eyes at

once haughty and tender; those sensual and disdainful lips; the poetic harmony of her features, seemingly so incompatible with the commonplace existence, patiently endured, of the chance wife of an ordinary or at least prosaic man, all these contradictions between her whole being and her lot in life, vaguely expressed in her countenance, were reasons why the silent woman should captivate the imagination and the senses like a tragic and mysterious sphynx, the keeper of rare secrets.

Needless to say that few of these poetic fancies crossed the minds of the semi-Africans who devoured Soledad with their eyes, but not for that reason were they blind to the substance of what we have just expressed, nor did they envy any the less, in hypothesis, the happy mortal who should draw the ill-starred heroine of love from her perpetual and necessary apathy, which is the same as saying that they envied, in a possible future contingency, our friend Manuel Venegas; the presumptive true lord of that imprisoned heart. As for Luisa and Señor de Mirabel, as doctors in art, in vice, and in sentiment, they comprehended the situation thoroughly and carried much further, on that afternoon, than my clumsy pen does now, the physico-poetico-moral analysis of La Dolorosa.

All at once there was a movement among the crowd, which quickly spread to the windows and balconies, as if some extraordinary occurrence had just taken place. What was the cause of that surging of the multitude? Was the procession about to

start? Had it stopped? Had some accident happened?

No; the cause of the commotion was that Manuel Venegas had just appeared at the head of the street of Santa Maria, that he was advancing direct toward the crowd, preceded by a squadron of noisy boys, and escorted at a respectful distance by half a dozen second-rate bullies; it was that the hero of the day was approaching!

Most of the people left the neighborhood of the church and walked up the street, the sooner to enjoy the presence of the ill-starred young man—who, meantime, kept quietly on his way without looking at anyone, his head slightly bent, and seemingly amusing himself by pushing aside with his stick the fragrant plants which carpeted the ground.

It could not be said, however, that he was indifferent to the public, since, in the midst of his grief, he had adorned himself so carefully to present himself before it worthily. Moors are by nature vain and artistic, and they go to battle arrayed in their most costly attire, and with all the magnificence possible, thinking danger perhaps an occasion of rejoicing. On the afternoon in question Manuel was dressed like a bridegroom, like a conqueror, not like a man whose life has been torn up by the roots, to wither and die. His dress was of lusterless black silk, adorned with many buttons of dull silver and loops of black silk cord; he wore a magnificent chip hat, with a broad brim, like those used beyond seas;

fine diamonds gleamed upon his fingers and in his embroidered shirt front, and from his neck depended a long and heavy gold chain, that disappeared in the folds of the Chinese sash tied around his waist, and to which, no doubt, was attached a superb watch, worthy of so haughty an Indian.

It might on better evidence have been affirmed that our young hero, contrary to his former custom, carried a weapon, and that this weapon was a dagger; for the most casual glance could not fail to observe its rigid form defined under the silk serge of his jacket. For the rest, if the travelers, who, twenty-four hours before had saluted him on the top of the neighboring Sierra, had seen him at this moment, they would have been horrified, and even moved to compassion, by the profound alteration that had taken place in his noble countenance. All its muscles were frightfully contracted; his eyes glowed with a fierce reddish light, like those of a lion in the paroxysm of a quartan fever, a sadness like that of death rested on those manly features—a despairing and terrible sadness, not plaintive or vehement, as if asking or even desiring consolation, but fixed, mute, stony, hopeless, much more threatening in its serenity than the fiercest outburst of anger would have been.

The people in the street did not at first venture on more than a distant salutation, giving him a "Good-day, Manuel!" as natural and unconstrained as if eight years had not passed since they had last met, to which the young man responded by touch-

ing his hat, without stopping to observe who the speaker might be.

A little farther on others, more daring, approached him and stopped him, offering to shake hands with him and inquiring after his health. They were old friends of his, they said, and among them he recognized the bully whose right arm he had once broken. Others called themselves his schoolmates (when, as we know, our hero had never gone to any other school than the study of Don Trinidad Muley!) and one man even presented himself to him as his foster brother, doubtless unaware of the fact that the young man had been nursed by his own mother.

Manuel answered them all in as few words as possible, and continued on his way; but he seldom passed from one group to another, without saying in a low voice, to the person who inspired him with most confidence:

"Tell me, which is Antonio Arregui?"

"He is not here." "He has not come." "They say he went out of town yesterday." "He is expected at any moment," the four persons whom he had questioned had severally responded to him, with a haste and an agitation that showed they understood the dreadful significance of the question.

Meantime our protagonist had reached the most crowded part of the street, that is to say, that part of it through which the procession was to pass; which very soon moved down a cross street toward

a certain ancient mosque, now a chapel of ease, where the festival was to terminate.

The vainer and more self-asserting of the women leaned far out of the balconies to see it pass. But Manuel did not once raise his head. No doubt he did not know, nor could it have occurred to him, that Soledad should have come to witness the procession—that she was a few steps away from him, that he would soon see her, after eight years of absence, their hearts separated, not now by the waters of the ocean, but by a still deeper abyss!

The wrathful Venegas looked only at the street and at the men, seeking that Antonio Arregui whom he had never seen, but whom he considered bound to confront him, to present himself in the palestra, to hasten to the public duel to which he had been cited, eight years before, in general and collective terms, and of which citation every habitant of the town must have personally notified him, the day on which he had dared to marry La Dolorosa. Manuel was going there to sustain this challenge. The threatened consort should regard it as a point of honor to answer the summons, not hide himself, not oblige the challenger to go in search of him to his hiding-place!

Let it be clearly understood that these words are not ours; the public and Manuel himself it was who made these reflections on the day in question. For the rest, the crowd continued to bow to the young man, or to stop him to speak to him, not daring, indeed, to touch the wounds of his heart, but ven-

turing now to put questions sufficiently impertinent to him.

For example :

"So you have come back very rich, eh?" one said to him familiarly.

Manuel smiled disdainfully, without deigning any answer.

Then the same person asked him, with more respect :

"Are you going to make a long stay in the town?"

"I do not know!" the unhappy man answered, turning his back on the questioner.

Some persons of weight and position, even, committed the indiscretion of accosting him, with the purpose of prying into his sorrow, his despair, and even into his pocket.

"You must help us to govern the town," said a member of the council to him, "and to that end you must purchase some lands in order to be eligible. The town council needs men like you. Would the grange of the Morisco be too high for you? A hundred thousand dollars they are asking for it."

"Many thanks. We shall see," answered Manuel.

"I will engage to make you alcalde!" cried another alderman; the same, according to report, who had offered the wand to Antonio Arregui.

Manuel bowed politely.

"But first," said a third, aiming this time at his heart, "you must establish yourself; you must settle down; you must take a wife. For I suppose you have not married in those countries!"

Venegas measured him with his glance (sending a chill of terror through him), and then said to him with a melancholy air:

"I don't know who you are, but I pity you," and he resumed his way down the street.

A few steps further on the young man perceived our friend, the captain, among the crowd, and immediately went up to him (a thing which he had done with no one else) and offered him his hand, respectfully taking off his hat with the other hand.

The old man was deeply moved by this marked exception, and could only find voice to say, while his eyes filled with tears:

"You have a good memory!"

"And good-will!" responded Manuel affectionately, again pressing his hand.

And he continued on his way, greatly pleased at this encounter.

He arrived at last in front of the little balcony in which Soledad was sitting; and, as if moved by some mysterious instinct, or constrained by some irresistible force, he mechanically stopped here, choosing this spot from which to watch the procession passing.

The crowd gave a deep sigh of satisfaction—mingled with terror.

And many glances were directed toward the street corners in search of Antonio Arregui, the only character now wanting to bring the drama to a conclusion.

The Madridlenian, under whose balcony the

young man had stopped, continued, meantime, the minute examination of his figure, which she had begun the moment he appeared on the scene, and said to her colleague Don Trajano, without removing her eye-glasses from her eyes:

"A handsome man! He is a statue dressed in Andalusian costume, although neither as a bravo nor a bull-fighter! The American ornaments of the dress give his figure a very poetical air. What a torso! What a neck! What a face! He is a model of masculine beauty! I don't know what to compare him to. For an Apollo, he is too powerful, and for a Hercules, too slender. I shall compare him, then, with Michael Angelo's David. Have you ever been in Florence?"

"No, Señora," stammered Don Trajano, greatly confused, thinking perhaps, of his own long legs and bowed shoulders, which could never, even in his youth, have been statuesque.

Meantime the attention of the crowd had been transferred from Venegas to Soledad.

The latter did not move a muscle; her attention seemed to be fixed on the sky or on the roof of the opposite house; although she must have known only too well that Manuel was there, in front of her, a few steps away! The gestures of the crowd, the remarks exchanged in the street, which could be heard on the balcony, the distress of her mother, poor Señá María Josefa, sitting like a martyr at her side, her own eyes, finally, endowed, as we already know, with the faculty of seeing even what they did

not look at—must have told it to her from the first moment. She appeared, however, perfectly tranquil, and she was even seen to smile graciously in answer to some words, accompanied by a supplicating gesture, addressed to her by her mother. She was the worthy daughter of the man who, surprised one afternoon by the infuriated Child of the Ball beside a certain fountain in the country, neither moved nor gave any sign that he was aware of his presence, nor took any step to avoid almost certain death!

At this juncture, and when some persons were already maliciously endeavoring to induce Manuel to raise his eyes so that he might see Soledad, the third peal of the bells of Santa María began; more rockets flew whizzing through the air; a prolonged roll of the drum sounded, followed by the measured sounds of a march, and banners, lights, brothers, and acolytes could be seen to leave the church, form in line, and put themselves in orderly movement. The procession was in the street.

The joyous clamor, the animated and solemn spectacle, the religious hymns which had now begun, all this re-enactment of the scenes of happier days, produced in Manuel a sudden agitation, making him lift his head and look around him, as if seeking a life-giving breath of air, to relieve the oppression of his heart, betrayed by the deep sigh which escaped at last from his overlaid breast.

And then it was that the unhappy man saw Soledad's unperturbed face shining in the balcony opposite.

It was she! There was not a doubt of it. It was her angelic countenance! Those eyes, that did not look at him, but continued illumining and beautifying the world, were hers! "Soledad!" the miserable man, wild with happiness, was on the point of crying out in the first transport of his passion.

But alas, no, it was not she! It was not Soledad! It was the wife of another man, the wife of a stranger called Antonio Arregui! It was the impure apostate of love! It was the sacrilegious woman who had spat on the heart of the tenderest and loyalest of lovers! It was the traitor who had stabbed him in the back, in his absence, without risk to herself, when, most confident and most tranquil, he was struggling in remote climes to win her, to make her his wife, to attain the happiness of being her slave! It was the evil genius of his life! It was the poisoner of his soul!

This was what Manuel's countenance said. This was what his heart said, looking out of his horrified eyes, to see whether Soledad indeed dared to sit in that balcony, in gala attire, taking part in a festival, showing herself in the light of day, *after what she had done!*

And he saw her there and he could not comprehend it. And the growing fury of his never tamed pride now verged on madness.

How was it that the iniquitous woman did not tremble? Did she not know that her judge had arrived? Had not her mother told her of it? Did she not know that he was there, before her, waiting

for the imbecile who thought himself her husband, that he might stab him to the heart, in view of the whole town? Did she not know that she herself, his former queen and mistress; she, who did not deign to look at him, and who seemed to defy him with her indifference, she, who continued to insult him with that fashionable white mantilla, and with that vile beauty which she had given to another, had also reason to tremble for her own life?

And why delay? One bound and he would be on the balcony. The dagger throbbed, thirsting for blood at each pulsation of his heart! He had already pressed it several times against his breast, like a faithful friend. Besides, Antonio (as the perfidious creature would call him!) was absent, had fled. Everyone had just assured him of it. This was not the time to think of killing him, then. She it was whom he must think of now, the serpent, who still continued to lash his soul, that insolent and contumacious sinner who, pleased and diverted, watching the procession approach, paid no heed to her mother's opportune entreaties, nor to the signs by which the public itself was beginning to warn her of her danger, to counsel her to retire from the window, to tell her that Manuel might at any moment attack her! And he must also think of that obsequious public, intent upon his every movement, of that amiable multitude who did not cease to regard him with anticipated wonder; of those three thousand persons waiting and hoping for some extraordinary outburst, worthy of the son of Don Rodrigo

Venegas, suited to the former Child of the Ball, adequate to his past threats, in consonance with the general inquietude which for twenty-four hours past had reigned in the town. No more vacillation!

It was decreed by fate! Manuel Venegas must kill La Dolorosa!

But the procession had meantime continued to advance, and was now passing between Soledad and Manuel, cutting them off from each other, in a certain sense.

The young man was, therefore, obliged to restrain himself, but not for this did his fury abate.

And thus he beheld pass before him, as in a fantastic vision, mocking his amorous frenzy, the historic standards of the time of the Conquest, the tall candlesticks of the parish, the beadles with their metal rods, the pious women walking barefooted, in fulfillment of some vow, the rustics with their cloaks of Ohanes cloth, the members of the fraternity with their badges, the National Guard with their helmets slung from their backs, the musicians with their bassoons, the precentors with their music, the acolytes with their thuribles. The Child of the Ball, the Child Jesus, the Child of the Sweet Name, must now be very near; so near, indeed, that the silvery tinkle of the bells of the frame on which he was borne could already be heard; already its hundred lights could be seen shining; already the odor of the incense could be perceived.

Manuel had not yet looked at the beautiful image which he had loved so dearly in his childhood and

his youth. Soledad, on the other hand, did not take her eyes from it for an instant, recalling, no doubt, the years in which that throne of flowers, fruits, and live white doves, on which stood the sumptuously attired Child, had been exclusively due to the care and the liberality of the man who had loved her so ardently, who still loved her so ardently, and who was so unhappy at this moment. Certain it is that the daughter of Don Elias began to be disconcerted, to be moved, to be confused, and that her eyelids and her parted lips trembled slightly, as if she were on the verge of tears. Then, indeed, everyone thought her beautiful! Then, indeed, she looked like a Virgin of Sorrows!

The general emotion, too, was extraordinary. The public was in one of its fleeting moments of inspiration and generosity. Whether owing to providence or to chance, there were here reunited so many pathetic circumstances, that the great poet and artist, called the Public, had recovered its sovereign majesty and had begun to feel nobly and mercifully. The image passed at last between Soledad and Manuel; and, as she followed it with her eyes, and as he did not take his eyes for an instant from the beauty's face, it chanced that their glances met; that there was established between them both an invincible current of love and sympathy, and that the presumptive murderer and the presumptive victim could not now keep from looking at each other wildly, with adoration, with religious frenzy in their gaze. That is to say, that Manuel saw at the

same time, blended together and confounded, the image of the Child Jesus, that had been his idol for so many years, and the image of his other fallen idol, of the afflicted Dolorosa, who had begun to weep bitterly, and who gazed at him through streaming tears.

Ah! Soledad weeping! This was something that had never before been seen, and that no one would have believed possible. "Soledad weeping!" the public said to one another in amazement. Soledad weeping! cried the soul of the fanatic lover, of the noble and feeling Venegas, of the tender and generous man, who was hard only when he was met by resistance, who was cruel only toward rebellion. His adored one weeping! Weeping for him! Weeping, if it were only through fear! weeping—perhaps through love and grief at seeing herself bound to another, and hated by him who had always been the lord of her soul! His mistress weeping, while he was still in the world!

A cry of infinite love, of immense pity, burst from the heart of Don Rodrigo's son, and, urged by some sudden impulse of heroic madness, recalling to every mind his father's death, the rash man rushed toward the balcony, scarcely conscious of what he was doing, as if to console Soledad, to forgive her, to protect her against himself, to snatch her from the usurper called her husband, who was the cause of those tears.

But this change in his feelings had been so sudden that the procession still continued to separate

the two lovers. The image had already passed, but the canopy was at this moment passing.

The miserable man, then, carried away by his tender impulse, passed under the canopy.

"He is going to kill her!" cried the multitude, meantime, believing that Manuel carried with him death and madness.

And Manuel, who heard this horrible, and now calumnious cry, Manuel, who did not wish to leave the public for a single instant under this cruel misapprehension, Manuel, who saw that many of the crowd were still kneeling before the holy image, suddenly knelt down also, stopping short in his swift career, feigning, with the rapidity and the astuteness characteristic of the mad, a tardy homage to the Child of the Ball.

The madman, then, sheltered under the sacred canopy, now appeared to everyone a repentant sinner. So said the pleased countenances of the bearers of the canopy. So said the religious emotion displayed by the crowd. And, as meantime the procession had stopped, detained and thrown into confusion by these dramatic incidents, there was time for the multitude, moving on, wave upon wave, to contemplate the marvelous spectacle presented by this savage and ferocious man, who a short time previously had been characterized as an assassin, that madman who had kept the town in a state of terror since the evening of the day before, kneeling now under the canopy of the Child Jesus, his head bowed, his face hidden in his hands, in

an attitude, seemingly, of the humblest penitence.

It needed but little, however, to dispel the illusion of the public, and to convince them that Manuel was not at this moment by any means a contrite sinner. We say this because just then it was noticed that La Dolorosa's mother and the mistress of the house were trying to take away from the balcony the miserable girl, who was on the point of fainting, and Manuel, seeing this from the spot where he was kneeling, furtively watching his opportunity to pursue his loving advance, he was seized by a new access of rage and madness, and raising himself cautiously to a half-upright position, he put one foot forward, as the tiger puts forward his paw to give the spring.

"Hold him! hold him!" cried two or three persons who, being close to him, could see that he had risen to his feet, they themselves retreating meanwhile. "Hold him; he is not pacified!"

Manuel gave the speakers a dreadful glance and smile, and, still stooping, and glancing to right and left, as if to guard against being stopped, he advanced resolutely toward the balcony.

But at this moment he heard above his head the thunder of a terrible voice, saying in indignant accents:

"Where are you going, ungrateful boy? Why do you not wish to see me? What injury have I done you by loving you?"

And at the same time he saw his progress op-

posed by a sort of mountain of gold that had interposed itself between him and the house which he was about to assault.

It was the portly form of Don Trinidad Muley, the rector of Santa María, the officiating priest of the procession, arrayed in a choir-cope of cloth of gold and silver, admirably adapted to set off his ample and majestic proportions.

Manuel, in spite of his frenzy, uttered a cry of mingled love and grief at finding himself face to face with the worthy priest, his former protector, his second father, the being to whom he owed most in the world, and he kissed his hands and face amid the enthusiastic exclamations and the tears of emotion of the multitude.

"Leave me! Go away!" cried the wily Trinidad, meantime. "The procession cannot be delayed! I repeat to you that you are an ingrate! To shut the door of your house in my face! To insult me before the whole town!"

In the interim Soledad and her mother had disappeared.

"Forgive me, Señor Rector!" stammered Manuel, ashamed of having offended his benefactor.

"Leave me! I don't wish to see you!" replied Don Trinidad, feigning to be more angry than ever.

"Don't cast me off, Señor Rector," persisted the young man. "Consider that I am very unhappy! Do not increase my despair by your contempt!"

"Well, then, take hold of this and follow me!" answered his former protector, "But be silent now.

Here, there must be no talking. Gentlemen, forward with the procession!"

And, as he said this, the priest held out to Manuel a corner of the cope, which was mechanically taken hold of by this poor sick man, who stood in so urgent need of true affection.

And the procession resumed its course, and behind it walked Don Trinidad Muley, singing in stentorian tones, while he furtively watched Manuel to see that he did not loosen his hold on the cope; and behind Don Trinidad walked the terrible young man, clinging to the sacred garment, and behind the redeemed sheep (Don Trajano's expression), swarmed an immense crowd, crying:

"A miracle! A miracle! Huzza for the Infant Jesus!"

.....
"What the devil can that be?" many persons in the more distant balconies meantime were asking.

"What should it be?" responded several voices from the street. "That Manuel Venegas was on his way to kill La Dolorosa, when suddenly he fell upon his knees under the canopy of the Infant Jesus, and afterward walked piously in the procession. Look! there he goes—holding fast to Don Trinidad Muley's golden cope!"

"That is a lie! It wasn't so!" exclaimed Vitriol's disciples, and the catechumens whom he already had in this quarter. "What happened was that La Dolorosa burst into tears when she saw her old adorer; that the priest bestowed some abuse upon

the latter for not having admitted him to his house to-day, and that, as a consequence of both things together, our bully walked behind his former master like a charity child, a lamb, like the youngest acolyte of the parish. That's what those hectors are! A great deal of bluster ending in nothing!"

"So La Dolorosa shed tears!" said the neutral part of the chorus. "A bad sign that for Antonio Arregui! First love is the strongest. You shall see that all this will end where it ought to have begun—by the two lovers coming to an understanding, and Antonio Arregui's going back to Rioja! A pity about the factory! The cloth made in it was so excellent and so cheap!"

At this moment—that is to say, when the procession had reached the Calle de Santa Luparia, and Soledad and her mother had returned home by out-of-the-way streets, and everything seemed ended for that afternoon—a great commotion was observable at the bottom of the Calle de Santa María.

"Antonio Arregui has arrived! Antonio Arregui is coming! Antonio Arregui is there! Look at him! That's he! - And what a face he wears!" several persons cried in tones more or less hushed, pointing to a man of fine presence, who was walking hastily up the middle of the street, followed by several ragamuffins, his face distorted by anger, and his eyes fixed on the house where Soledad and Señá María Josefa had been passing the afternoon.

And it was wonderful to see with what address the public, as happens in these cases, accepted and

performed their parts, without having had any previous understanding among themselves. While some stopped the furious Riojan and related to him circumstantially all that had occurred, reminding him that his wife and his mother-in-law had got away *unharméd*, and begging him with an affected drawl to be *prudent* and go home, others walked up the street for the purpose of overtaking Manuel Venegas and informing him of what had occurred, with the intention, no doubt, of ending by hypocritically asking him, also, to give up his foolishness and his talk, and avoid a disagreeable encounter with the furious husband of the unfortunate daughter of Don Elias Perez.

Happily, there were not wanting in the crowd some charitable souls, better advised than these latter, who, running faster than they, whispered a few seasonable words to Don Trinidad Muley.

"Hurry, boys!" then cried the priest to the bearers of the image. "Come! come! it is growing dark. Quicker, you lazy fellows! Enough procession for to-day! And you, Manuel mine, don't let go your hold. This devil of a cope weighs a thousand arrobas, and you are helping me to carry it!"

The procession, then, broke into a run. The bearers of the frame, harangued incessantly by Don Trinidad, hurried on without paying any regard whatever to the order of the procession; the bearers of the canopy hurried after those of the frame, making great strides with their poles, and priests, aco-

lytes, choir-boys, musicians, brothers, public, and escort formed an indescribable medley.

"But what is the matter? What are you running so fast for?" asked the beables, brandishing their wands.

"Never mind! never mind! Forward!" responded Don Trinidad Muley, panting for breath.

And, not very certain yet that this glorious flight would suffice for his purpose, he called to the septuagenarian captain, who walked behind him, representing the army; told him in a whisper what was going on in the other street, and ended by saying to him under his breath:

"As a last resource, draw your sword! But, for Heaven's sake, don't strike anyone except with the flat."

Fortunately, Manuel was so engrossed in his own gloomy thoughts that he observed nothing of all this, and he allowed himself to be led by the spiritual father, like a blind man by one who has sight.

"Do you know what has happened?" here exclaimed a disciple of Vitriol's, running up hurriedly and forcing his way to Manuel Venegas.

"Hold your tongue, or I'll strangle you!" roared the captain, clutching him by the throat and flinging him aside.

And then, pretending that he was unable to walk so fast, he took firm hold of Manuel's left arm, still keeping an eye on Vitriol's ferocious disciple.

Our hero was thus cut off from communication with the public; and, in this way, taken in tow by

the good priest, and himself taking in tow the honest captain, he at last entered with them the chapel of Santa Luparia, where, as a precautionary measure, Don Trinidad Muley locked him into a small office communicating with the sacristy.

It was in time he did so. A moment later Antonio Arregui, followed by a number of people, arrived at the portico of the chapel, in quest of Manuel Venegas.

But he found himself face to face with the priest, clad in his vestments, who now awaited him without any fear whatever, and who said to him with dignity:

"Stop, Señor Don Antonio! My son is in sanctuary! In coming here you have done all that it behooves an honest man to do. Go quietly to your house, where I will see you early to-morrow morning, God willing!"

And turning to the crowd he added in a displeased voice:

"And you—to your affairs! to take care of your children, for well they need it, and leave the unhappy in peace!"

Antonio Arregui kissed the magnanimous priest's hand, without answering a single word, and then went quietly away.

The crowd also gradually dispersed, praising aloud, as they went, the prudence and wisdom of the famous Don Trinidad Muley, and thinking, at the same time, of the perilous dance of the raffle of the following day, as the gambler who has lost thinks of his revenge.

And soon there remained nothing but the recollection of the memorable procession of this day, as, of the fulgent sun that had lighted up the gayly decked and now dark streets, there remained only a fading glow fringing the clouds on the western horizon.

CHAPTER III.

THE LAST FLIGHT OF A PAIR OF PARTRIDGES.

IT cost Don Trinidad Muley no little trouble to rid himself of several other persons who had followed both Children of the Ball into the chapel and the sacristy, and who were still there, two hours after the procession had ended.

On the one hand, the members of the Brotherhood were holding, in the sacristy, the usual and always stormy meeting in which they annually elect (eating cakes and drinking a glass or two of rossolis) a new steward or superior brother, and, on the other, hundreds of rough fellows, who had made themselves tipsy at their own expense, had crowded into the church, determined to speak to Don Rodrigo's son, believing it to be their duty, no doubt, to notify him of Antonio Arregui's return, and the latter's manly conduct in coming here to seek satisfaction and revenge.

But the good spiritual father exerted himself to such purpose; he went back and forth so often between the church and the sacristy and the sacristy and the church; he had so many happy ideas in the meeting, and he entreated the others in such feeling terms, "to take pity, if only for that night,

on poor Manuel Venegas, instead of adding to his cruel sufferings," that he at last succeeded, at about eight o'clock, in ridding himself of the brothers, and of the last tippler, bravo, and busybody. He then put on his outdoor garments, gave the sacristan some orders—apparently of great importance—in an undertone; he screwed up his face as much as possible, in order to give himself an angry look, and then went to release his prisoner.

Strange to say, or strange at least it appeared to Don Trinidad—Manuel was writing quietly at a small desk which was kept there for the purpose of recording births, marriages, and deaths. He was very calm (too much so, perhaps), and just at this moment was affixing his signature to a sheet of paper, the four sides of which he had covered with writing, and which he closed with a perfectly calm air, without taking any notice of the priest's entrance, like one who is performing so meritorious an action that it relieves him from vain ceremonies. Then he placed the paper in his pocket, along with some others, and then, and then only, turned his eyes on the amazed and mute Don Trinidad.

The latter put on a still severer look on seeing that that glance expressed neither repentance nor meekness, but merely affection, devoid of gayety, and the calm of an unalterable resolution. But, as even thus he failed to intimidate Manuel, he turned his back upon him abruptly, and began to examine the ceiling, where in very truth there was nothing worthy of attention.

The young man then smiled gently and advanced toward his protector with open arms.

"Let me alone!" exclaimed the corpulent priest, drawing away from him.

But Manuel succeeded in approaching him; he embraced him in sections, I know not if with filial or with paternal familiarity, and at last said to him with an air of gentle entreaty, as if continuing the conversation begun at their first encounter:

"I, too, desired to speak to you, and, in proof of it, I intended to go to your house presently."

"At a good time!" growled the priest.

"I wished, among other things," continued the young man, with that gentle, childlike ingenuousness that made one forget his savage outbursts, "to give you a paper which I wrote at noon to-day, and in which I have just now made some alterations. I had it in my pocket this afternoon, and the authorities would have found it there, if it had been my fate to die in the procession."

"To die!" answered Don Trinidad severely, without taking his eyes from the ceiling. "Now you begin with your big words, so as to confound me! It would be better for you to explain to me why you did not admit me this morning. What a mortification to see myself insulted by you, before the public! And then, the way you treated poor Polonia! Twice in succession she came home crying at the contemptuous way you treated her."

"Forgive me, Señor Rector," responded Manuel with profound sadness. "To-day I have been ill,

very ill. Since last night I have not been master of myself."

"And are you so now?" asked Don Trinidad, turning his side face to the young man, and looking at him with a single eye, like the birds.

Manuel bent his head without answering.

"I see how it is!" responded the priest bitterly. "There, come home with me—that is to say, if you would like to see whether your old room has disappeared from the face of the earth, and to make friends with Polonia!"

"Yes, let us go, by all means," responded the young man affably.

"We will go out by the door of the cemetery, so that no one may notice us," said Don Trinidad, leading the way.

His former ward followed him like an automaton.

And they soon found themselves in a large yard overgrown with tall weeds, among which many bones shone white in the moonlight.

Manuel stood still in the middle of this dunghill of human life, likening it perhaps to the hell of his soul, and fell into profound meditation.

"Are you not coming?" said the priest to him from the door which opened out into the fields.

The young man glanced around as if bidding farewell to the peace of the place, or choosing a spot in which to enjoy it, and then followed the priest.

They walked on in complete silence for a long time, skirting the town to reach the gate nearest to

the priest's house. But as they were about to enter the town, through a lane formed by the ruined walls of two opposite gardens, Don Trinidad slackened his pace to allow the young man to join him, and muttered in a low voice, more angry than ever:

"The same as the scandal this afternoon! They told me all about it. So you tried to kill a poor woman!"

"Whoever says that lies!" exclaimed Venegas furiously, standing still.

And then he added with another species of fury:

"Would that I had had the courage to do it!"

"What is that you say, child of Lucifer?"

"I say that I did not try to kill Soledad this afternoon. I had intended to do so, but I could not. I had too little courage—too much love! And that is what grieves me! That is what terrifies me! Her tears pierced my heart like molten lead. I know that I am powerless against her. She has vanquished me. She is forgiven!"

The priest drew a breath of relief; but he asked one question more:

"Well, then, what was your purpose in trying to scale the balcony this afternoon?"

"Why!" responded the young man, with frightful naturalness. "To fly with her! to get her back! to redeem her from captivity! Don't you know that she loves me? Don't you know that she shed tears when she saw me?"

Don Trinidad nodded to himself, as much as to

say, "On that point we are all right; Soledad's life runs no risk."

And drawing his cloak more closely around him, with a certain air of satisfaction, he said aloud:

"Still with your notions! Polonia is right in saying you have a screw loose in your head."

And he entered the town.

Manuel hesitated for an instant, not knowing whether to go on with the priest or to run away, in order to escape new and embarrassing questions; but finally he decided on the former course and followed Don Trinidad, although keeping a few steps behind him.

In this way they arrived at the rectory, at the door of which Polonia was waiting, full of curiosity and alarm.

"Thank God!" she cried at sight of her former nursling, and without observing Manuel: "Tell me, then, child, what is the matter? Is what they say true?"

"Hold your tongue! he is here," answered the priest.

"Who?"

"See for yourself."

Polonia, who had not attended the procession, did not at first recognize Don Rodrigo's son; but when she saw that it was he, she threw herself on his neck and covered his face with kisses and tears.

Manuel responded affectionately to her caresses, but said little in answer to the good woman's innumerable questions.

"Let him alone, Polonia," said Don Trinidad. "Our godson is not well. Put a light in my study, and see that no one interrupts us."

"I understand—I understand. You want to be alone," grumbled the housekeeper, as she withdrew. "Well, he has come back crazier than he went away! What a pity! So handsome a man! For indeed the boy is that handsome that it's a pleasure to look at him!"

Don Trinidad and the young man having installed themselves in the study, the former began to walk up and down the room in silence, while the latter looked around, with infinite melancholy, on the simple furniture, so familiar to him, of the good priest.

Not one of the old articles was missing, nor was there any new article in the humble room; it seemed as if the last eight years had not existed for it. Everything was the same and in the same place as usual, reminding him of the sorrowful, the long past day, on which he had entered it for the first time, holding the hand of the benevolent priest.

Blessed equability, that of this mind; blessed tranquillity, that of this existence, whose sole wealth was virtue, whose only joys were the joys of others! Envious indeed was the lot of this man!

Don Trinidad, who, in spite of everything, was very wily, divined these thoughts of Manuel, and waited to allow his mind to become thoroughly penetrated with them, deeming that they could not but prove salutary to him; then, when some moments

had passed, he said to him, with apparent indifference:

"So that you intended to come to this poor dwelling, in any case?"

"Yes, Señor," responded the young man, as if awaking from a dream.

"And may one know for what purpose?"

"I told you that a short time ago—to deliver to you some papers. And also to acquit myself of some debts of affection—that is, to bid farewell to you and Polonia."

"To bid farewell? Why, do you intend to go away again? It would be the very best thing you could do!"

"It may be said that I have gone away already," answered Manuel in lugubrious accents. "Since last night I have ceased to belong to this world. The wind of misfortune has wrapped me in its wings, and when you see me go out from that door everything will have ended between you and me."

"I understand, I understand," murmured Don Trinidad, greatly troubled.

And immediately changing his tone, which was one of the principal resources of his oratory, he added familiarly:

"Apropos of settling accounts, I, too, have a little account—not of affection, but of money—to settle with you. It is a question of a few maravedis, something like twenty thousand reals, which you gave me at various times, when you were working in the Sierra. Here they are—in this money box,

bearing the inscription: 'Money belonging to my adopted son Manuel Venegas, left with me by him on deposit.' "

While he was speaking he had taken from a drawer of the desk, and placed on the table, a large red earthen money box.

Manuel, in the midst of his perturbation, felt all the force of this blow, and exclaimed with emotion:

"That money is yours! I did not give it to you to keep for me."

"I know that; you gave it to me to extend the worship of the Child Jesus, and to pay for your maintenance. But, as I did the former at my own expense, although for the good of your soul, and the second was not to be done at all—for that would have been to deprive me of the pleasure of supporting you at my own cost, as a father supports his son—it follows that the money is yours, and so much yours that you would have taken it with you when you went to America, if, before going, you had paid me the attention of coming to bid me good-by."

Manuel answered magnanimously:

"And I will accept it to-day, my dear father, in order that you may never have it to say that I desired to withhold from you my gratitude. In exchange, since we have come to speak of money, I will tell you now what I had intended to tell you by means of the document which I wrote this morning, and altered to-night. Here it is. It is, as one might say, my will, and in it I bequeath to you all

my wealth in trust, that you may dispose of it freely, either for your own behoof or that of the poor, after first paying a million reals to the heirs of Don Elias Perez, and delivering a legacy of a thousand ounces to our friend, the old captain, the companion-in-arms of my dear father. For all which, you will find in this pocketbook letters in your favor on the banking houses of Malaga, in which I have placed my funds. I also desire in my testament that, at my death, everything in my possession, money, jewels, and other things, be delivered to you. No one will have reason to say that I have been improvident! Take this, then, and keep it, in lieu of that blessed thousand dollars."

Don Trinidad's tears had been flowing in silence, from the moment in which Manuel had begun to speak in this strain, but when the latter ceased, he exclaimed, with feigned anger:

"Very well. Give it to me! I am glad that your mind is so tranquil! We will speak of this matter again on a more suitable occasion."

And he put into his pocket the document and the pocketbook which the young man had handed to him.

Then he began to walk up and down the room again, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand, endeavoring to regain his composure.

Suddenly he stopped in the middle of the room, and said:

"I suppose you are not one of those heretics who take their own lives——"

"And you are right in supposing so," Don Rodrigo's son hastened to reply. "Such a piece of folly has never occurred to me!"

"Of course not! You are too manly to do a thing which is against nature and against God! No created being commits suicide, beyond a few melancholy exceptions of the human species, who are wanting either in the sense or the courage to endure, and the religion to hope. When man is not the best of creatures, he is the worst! There is no medium."

With these words Don Trinidad resumed his walk, after again nodding significantly to himself, as if to say: "We are continuing to gain ground; there is nothing to be feared in this quarter, either."

A moment of embarrassed silence followed.

"So you were coming to say good-by, eh?" said the priest at last, walking up and down the room with his eyes fixed on the floor. "And yet you are neither going away, nor thinking of committing suicide! Well, then, there is a mystery here which must be unraveled!"

And he planted himself before Manuel, his head inclined to one side, his arms behind his back, and his abdomen on complete exhibition; he fixed his eyes—eyes like a Moorish anchorite's, expressing at once boldness, fanaticism, and paternal affection—on Manuel, and basing the question, by way of exordium, in an affectionate embrace, which obliged the young man to retreat a step, he said to him with the utmost nobleness;

"Let us understand each other, Manolo! What do you intend to do? You and I are both honest and honorable men. Tell me the truth, as you have always done!"

"Let me alone, Señor Rector," exclaimed poor Venegas, with genuine alarm, and now greatly regretting having entered the priest's house, "I cannot answer that question. Let me go away—I am feverish—I need rest."

"Perverse boy!" replied Don Trinidad, greatly offended. "You don't care for me. You despise me! You have forgotten the night when I went and took you out of the bedroom in which your father died. You have forgotten your father, too, that true nobleman, that mirror of gentlemen, incapable of thinking things which he was ashamed to utter!"

"You say that I don't care for you!" burst out the young man, wounded also in his dignity. "Why, then, am I here, when hell is calling to me? You say that I have forgotten my father! Would that it were so! But I am what I am. Leave me to follow my unlucky star!"

"And tell me—what are you? Things must be called by their right names! Are you a criminal? Are you an assassin? You, the son of Don Rodrigo Venegas! You, the godson of Don Trinidad Muley! Answer me, man. Have the courage to tell me!"

Manuel looked in amazement at Don Trinidad.

"You do not answer me," continued the latter.

"Then you are not satisfied with your plans. Then you condemn yourself. Then you cling to evil knowingly."

"And what is evil? What does bad mean? What does good mean?" cried Manuel abruptly. "I have been asking myself that question for a long time past."

"Hello!" exclaimed Don Trinidad ironically, "so you, too, entangle yourself in those labyrinths! Well, I will answer you."

And, as if in order to do so, he was obliged to enter into the sanctuary of the virtuous heart, which was his Bible, he bowed his head and folded his hands with an ineffable expression of seraphic reverence, until finally these sweet reflections fell from his lips:

"Bad—is everything that is done without an interior joy. Bad—is to desire to enjoy and to make a display at the cost of others. Bad—is to fear to suffer pain to the extent of causing others to suffer it. Bad—is to love one's self more than those who ask with tears for pity. Bad—is to prefer to take vengeance for an offense rather than please a priest. Bad is—your behavior toward me at this instant! And good—is—what is good? The very word expresses it. Good is, for example, to suffer with pleasure in order that others may not suffer; to shed tears of joy when one has taken the bread out of one's mouth to give it to another; to sacrifice one's self generously, to forgive, to conquer one's self, to go away, to die that others may live. In short, I

know what I mean, and you know what I mean. Above all, Manuel, what is very bad, what is detestable, is to cast down one's eyes as you are doing now, trying to escape from your own conscience, which is peeping out of them, saying that I am in the right. And if this is not so, look me straight in the face, with your old ingenuous and noble courage, like the lion's, not with the grim ferocity of a bloodthirsty tiger, and see if you have the heart to tell me that there is anything in the world you would refuse me, beginning with your life—me, who love you like a father; me, who would give you every drop of blood in my body, if you needed it; me, who ask pardon from you with these tears; pardon for your fellow-beings, pardon in the name of Christ crucified!"

"Señor Rector!" answered Manuel, with manly feeling, "my life is yours. I give it to you willingly. But kill me this very instant."

"But I do not ask you for your life. I ask you for more and for less. I ask you for the sacrifice of your self-love, the sacrifice of your obstinacy and your pride. In a word, I do not desire your blood; I desire that you should cast from it your love for Soledad, and your anger against Antonio Arregui."

"And that I should live afterward! Impossible! Consider the matter well, father, and you will see that that is impossible."

"Impossible to sacrifice one's self, and to live? How do you know that?" replied Don Trinidad with a smile that was truly saintlike. "Then it is

that one truly lives! And where would be the sacrifice if one did not go on living? Believe me, my son, it is a great life, that of the being who has suffered, and who suffers for the good of others! God increases this good a hundredfold, and diffuses it like a celestial balm in the heart of the one who has sacrificed himself. You smile incredulously. Do you think that I am talking of imaginary cases? Do you think I am not a man? Do you think I am made of stone? Do you think I have not battled with my passions? Well, then, listen. I was twenty-two. There was a woman whom I loved as you love Soledad, and who loved me in return. We meant to be married, and my parents willingly gave their consent. But my father suddenly died, taking with him when he left us, the key of the pantry, and my poor mother fell ill from working so hard to provide for us. Of eight children, I was the eldest. After me came four sisters. Then three little brothers. Although I worked day and night in a pottery, a time came when we were in want of bread, for my efforts did not suffice to supply food for all. 'For all!' mark the words well; for, as for myself alone, and to be able to marry, I had been earning enough for a long time past. The prelate of that time pitied our distress, and, seeing my devotion to the Holy Virgin, he offered to give me a good parish if I wished to take orders, and in the meantime a good maintenance. My mother, who saw her children starving before her eyes, but who also knew the state of my heart, wept when she communicated his

offer to me. And what do you suppose I answered? Well, I answered 'Amen,' embracing her and consoling her, when it was I who stood in need of consolation. I gave up my Soledad, who was as beautiful as yours. And I bade her good-by forever—both of us weeping, but both very happy in spite of everything, because we had nothing to be ashamed of, and a great deal of which to be proud.

"And I was ordained. And God helped me! And here I am! Do you suppose that I did not suffer afterward? Do you suppose that it did not cost me an effort, at first, to turn my head aside when I met my former sweetheart? Do you suppose that I did not shed tears of blood? But how happy I was in the midst of my grief! My mother died blessing me, seeing all her children living in comfort, thanks to my protection and my help. My sisters married well. My brother Andrés is the sacristan of San Gil. Francisco I bought from conscription, and he is now a schoolmaster. Tomás has a galley and two carts, and he is growing rich, trafficking with the towns of the Levant. My sweetheart herself married an excellent man, and has had children. And I, Manuel, I, who dreamed of having children, also; I, the former lover; I, the man born to command a regiment and to do all that men do, I have spent my life putting on my clothes over my head, like a woman; I have swallowed my rage; I have castigated my flesh, like a vicious and rebellious brute, and here I am, I say, full of pride and joy; happier than any of my brothers; more

joyful than if I had done my own pleasure, marrying the woman I loved; happier than any king or emperor on the earth, in being able to say to you, in the presence of God, that I have triumphed over myself; that I do not remember a worldly thought at which I have cause to blush; that I have been faithful to all my vows; that when I die they can bury me with a palm, like the nuns. Will you still say to me that it is not possible to sacrifice one's self, and to live?"

Manuel gazed intently at the species of African colossus, who spoke in this way at forty-eight years of age, and he could not but yield him the homage of his admiration.

"I am not so great," he responded presently; "or else my love for Soledad is greater than was yours for the woman you loved. I cannot conquer it. I know that I shall not conquer it!"

"But you do not desire——"

"I do desire. That is to say, I desire to desire. But I cannot."

"Yes, you can! Although exceptional circumstances have made a sort of wild beast of you, you have the heart of a man; and the heart of a man who follows the example of Christ is more courageous than the hearts of all the lions and elephants in the universe together. The courage to humble one's self, to conquer one's self, to give up one's own will, is the true courage. And you ought not to be lacking in it. In spite of everything, you are good. You were so when you were a boy; you

resemble your father greatly—your father, who died for love of his fellow-men and of his honor!"

"I, too, desire to die for my honor!" replied Manuel quickly. "Eight years ago I contracted an obligation of honor toward the whole town—eight years ago I swore to kill the man who should marry my beloved. A man has dared to take up my glove; the whole town has its eyes fixed upon me. What can I do? What must I do in order to escape ridicule, in order that those who have hitherto trembled in my presence may not laugh at me?"

"It is very simple! Repent of your evil purpose; love your neighbor more than yourself, retract your oath—I release you from it."

"That is not enough."

"I am a priest."

"That is not enough! I should deceive you if I told you the contrary. I must go to-morrow to the raffle to keep my appointment. If Soledad and her husband are not there, if they do not present themselves in response to the public citation, which I will make them at the proper time, I will offer gold, a great deal of gold, all the gold I have brought with me, to dance with Señora de Arregui. The Brotherhood cannot then refuse to go in quest of her. If they bring her alone, I will not give her back to her husband; if her husband accompanies her I will kill him; if neither of them appears I will go to their house for them."

"Heavens! How horrible!" exclaimed Don Trinidad. "And God? And the laws? And the author-

ities? Do you suppose there are no authorities in this town? Do you suppose that you are still among savages?"

"The authorities always come *afterward*. Leave that to my care! I will contrive that when they come Antonio Arregui shall be very dead! As for the laws, Soledad can break them, as so many other women in love do, by going to the ends of the world with me. And as far as God is concerned, it is in his power to kill me this very instant. It was in his power not to have made me so unfortunate!"

"All that you think, all that you say is abominable!" replied Don Trinidad, in an impressive voice. "It fills me with horror to think that I have brought you up! So I am nothing to you, then! So you despise my tears! You desire, perhaps, that I should kneel to you?"

"No, father, what I desire is that you, taking me as I am, and not asking miracles of sanctity from me, shall tell me what I must do in the state in which my heart is, and after the oath I have taken. Do you desire that I should kill myself? Do you desire that I should go mad?"

"You are mad already!" answered the priest. "If you were not so, you would comprehend that what you ought to do, is to go away from the town."

"Where? What for?" asked the young man, with infinite anguish.

"Where? Where you have been for the last eight years. What for? To serve God and not the devil. To be an upright man, to help your fellow-men, to

convert into flowers every thorn that pierces your heart."

"It is you who are dreaming, Don Trinidad! You tell me that you have loved, and you propose such a course to me! You have never loved, nor do you know what love is. Where should I go with my darkened life, leaving my soul's soul behind me here? What should I live for? Eight years I have lived upon the hope of returning to this town and marrying Soledad. What should I live upon now? A moment since you spoke to me of God. Well, listen to the sentence decreed by God the day he sent me into the world: 'For Manuel Venegas there shall be no other wife, no other happiness, no other heaven than Soledad.' I have twice made the circuit of the globe; I have seen women, many women, some of them regarded as goddesses, in Circassia, in Greece, in Cuba, in Peru. For me they were neither goddesses nor women, they were nothing; they were, at most, the absence of Soledad—something for me hateful and melancholy. Thus it was that I turned my eyes away from them, and continued on my pilgrimage. That is to say, father, that I have gone further than you. Neither before consecrating my soul to Soledad—and I consecrated it to her at thirteen years of age; nor since that day—neither in this town, nor while absent from it, have I been false to her, even in thought. I, too, have been faithful to my religion. I, too, have kept my vows!"

"And the traitress has rewarded you well!" said

the priest, touching another key, in the hope of undeceiving this idolator.

The latter raised his hand to his heart, as if he had just received a sudden stab in it, but he soon recovered himself, and cried boldly, looking at his second father with the impulsiveness of a fanatic:

"She has not rewarded me well, but I love her better than ever!"

Don Trinidad drew back a step, filled with terror. It seemed as if the last blow, with which he had tried to vanquish his antagonist, had recoiled upon himself, destroying many illusions. Manuel still remained unshaken. This long conversation had been all in vain, then!

But the valiant priest was not discouraged. He seemed rather to retire within himself, as if to change his plan of battle. Defeated on the first line of operations, it was evident that he had fallen back upon and was strengthening his second, calling on his last re-enforcements, in other words, the reserve force which he had opportunely prepared before leaving the chapel of Santa Luparia. This, at least, was what was to be deduced from his words and actions, from the moment when Manuel pronounced that formidable answer.

"Well! it is plain I'm to have no sleep to-night," he said, patting himself compassionately. "Polonia! Polonia! bring me my cloak! A pretty man! A pretty reward he was keeping for my old age! To grant me nothing! To let me talk and talk, and then to refuse me everything! To tell me that

homicide and adultery are indispensable! And this is what I brought you up for! This is what I have loved you so dearly for!"

Thus spoke Don Trinidad, without looking at his former ward, who heard these words with more emotion and agitation than all the others that had preceded them. It was evident, too, that those, although so vehemently contradicted, still resounded in his soul, and, as a result of it all, he approached the priest, and said to him with affectionate reverence:

"What are you going to do? What are you asking your cloak for? Are you going out?"

"Yes, Señor," responded Don Trinidad harshly.

"But where are you going?"

"Where should I go? Where my duty as a Christian calls me! To prevent those crimes which, as you tell me, you are going to commit! To stick to you like your shadow, to follow you wherever you go, to spend the rest of my life with you, although you should kick me out of your house, and I should have to spend the nights sitting outside your door! In that way you will have to step over my dead body to perform the exploits you have told me of, and so your work will be more complete!"

Manuel drew back horrified.

At the same instant Polonia entered the study, with Don Trinidad's cloak, saying in an alarmed voice:

"Are you going into the street at this hour?"

"Yes, daughter, yes! Into the street! and into

hell if it be necessary! Don't expect me back to-night."

"But, your reverence, that is to kill yourself!" exclaimed his former nurse. "So late as it was when you went to bed last night, half dead with fatigue, after scouring the country for hours——"

"Looking for you," interrupted Don Trinidad, nudging Manuel, without looking at him.

"And this morning," continued Polonia, "you got up before daybreak, and you haven't rested for a single moment since, with so many functions in the parish, and so much commotion in the streets—through whose fault I know."

"What would you have, daughter!" said the priest hypocritically. "There is no remedy but to toil on until the time comes when one drops down with fatigue! Go to bed and rest, for you too have worked very hard to-day. Poor little old woman! How sorry I am to cause you all these annoyances! So, come, then, Señor Don Manuel. You shall say where we are to go first—whether to look for a worthy man, in order to kill him, or to make love to an honest matron!"

Manuel had remained standing in a corner of the apartment, with his back to Don Trinidad, and his eyes fixed on the floor, a shudder running through him at every fresh reproach launched against him in this discourse. The priest's last words, especially, so sarcastic and bitter, drew from him a sort of groan, as if they had pierced his soul.

Polonia, meantime, replied:

"But you are not going out without taking your supper! It is ten o'clock, and you have had nothing to eat since one, but the poor *puchero* that you scarcely tasted."

"That's very true. But what would you have? That is the way things happen!"

"Remember that there's a pair of stewed partridges—and you are so fond of them!"

"I can smell them now, and, in spite of these annoyances, I was thinking about them. God forgive me! but it is my only vice—to sup well on great days. But I wish to give this coward a proof that man is master of his passions, his appetites, and his will. Tell the servant to take that pair of partridges at once, with my bread and my angel's hair conserve—in short, everything you were going to give me for supper to-night, to the poor widow of the mason who was killed the other day. In that way she will be able to celebrate to-day's festival with her children, while to think of the joy of those unhappy creatures will be food enough for me!"

"But, child," observed the housekeeper in an undertone, "consider that you will be fainting with hunger! It is all very well to give away the partridges, and God will bless you for the thought. But eat something else instead."

"No! I won't eat any supper! Now the sacrifice is made! I shall see the procession of the souls in purgatory to-night—and may God reward me by enlightening the understanding of that ignorant boy!"

"This is too much!" cried Manuel, approaching Don Trinidad. "You are resolved to kill me! You have no pity upon me!"

"Well, if I haven't, I don't know who has," answered the priest coldly. "The public, perhaps, who are thinking of amusing themselves at your expense, as if they were going to the theater to see a tragedy."

"What I ask you," the young man tenderly persisted, "is to take your supper and go to bed."

"It rests with you whether I shall do so or not. Stay to take supper and to sleep with me. If not partridges, for they are not now ours, we can eat fresh eggs and raw ham; and as for a bed, your old cot must be there still."

"His room is just as he left it!" said Polonia, with indescribable joy.

"Señor Rector, I must go home," stammered Manuel inexorably.

"And I with you," answered Don Trinidad, with feigned good-humor. "You shall have things your own way. So let us be going. Good-by, Polonia—until God wills!"

"My God! My God! what is to become of me!" groaned poor Venegas, preparing to depart. "I did not count with this man!"

"Wait a little," exclaimed Don Trinidad, interposing himself before the door of the study. "I have some orders to give Polonia."

Manuel dropped into a chair.

Don Trinidad went out into the hall with the housekeeper, and said to her hastily :

"You must send at once for Señá María Josefa. If she is not in her own house, send to her daughter's——"

"She has been waiting outside there for the past half hour," answered the housekeeper.

"Ah, Heaven has sent her to me! I am going to speak to her. Stay you here on guard; and if you should see that my prisoner has any thoughts of escaping, let me know. But don't speak to him."

A few moments later the priest had ended his conference with Soledad's mother, and was back again at the door of the study, saying to the dejected young man :

"Whenever you are ready we can go."

"Stay you, Don Trinidad!" said Manuel rising, with a supplicating gesture.

"It's of no use for you to call on Don Trinidad! Wherever you go I will go; if you go to your house, I will go to your house—which is the best thing we could do; if you run about the streets, I will run about the streets. Ah! I was forgetting the money box."

Thus spoke the indomitable priest, and, taking the young man's early savings, he went resolutely out into the hall and began to descend the stairs, at the same time calling out :

"Come, come and give me your arm; I am dropping with fatigue."

Manuel bent his head, and went with Don Trini-

dad, who clung to his right arm with such force that it would have been no easy matter to decide which was the strong man and which the weak, which the captor and which the captive.

Finally, when he had reached the street door, Don Trinidad walked back to the courtyard, dragging Manuel backward and forward with him, as if he were a drunken man, and shouted:

"Polonia, take care not to make any delay in sending the partridges to the person we spoke of!"

Adding after a moment, in an undertone:

"And how good the rogues must be! That Polonia cooks like an angel!"

CHAPTER IV.

CHILDREN AND OLD PEOPLE.

DON TRINIDAD and Manuel encountered few persons in the streets, in going to the young man's house, and these few drew back against the walls, with no less terror than respect, to allow the two notable persons, of whom all the town was talking, to pass.

Such was not the case, however, when, having reached the Plaza Mayor, they had to pass by the famous apothecary's shop.

This was partly closed, and through the half-door, through which the light inside still shone, Vitriol could be seen bidding good-by to his visitors, and giving them perhaps their instructions for the following day.

As soon as they perceived and recognized, by the light of the moon, the interesting group formed by the priest and Manuel, they began to laugh and to whisper together, and some of the more youthful among them even ventured to follow the two men, keeping so close to them as almost to touch them, in the hope of overhearing an occasional phrase.

Their curiosity was disappointed, however, for neither the priest nor his former guest uttered a

single word on the whole road, and in this way they at length entered the former precentor's house.

On this night it had been brilliantly illuminated, through the care of the punctilious Basilia; the door stood wide open, and all the servants were at their posts, in order to receive the master with the honors befitting his great wealth and his royal Mohammedan lineage.

The Malagan muleteer, who was lodged here with his three mules, and who was resolved not to leave the town until after the raffle, which Venegas himself had described to him so glowingly on the previous day, was in the courtyard, acting as door-keeper, and he saluted, with a profound reverence, the extraordinary personage with whom he had made three long days' journey, without ever suspecting that he was traveling with the terror and the wonder of the town.

At the foot of the stairs was the perfidious Volanta, who was not only the friend of Vitriol and the dependent of Soledad and Señá María Josefa, but also the familiar spirit of Polonia and Basilia, which is equivalent to saying that she went about freely and under safe conduct in both camps, like any other traitor and spy. Don Trinidad, who was a man of clear insight, gave her a look of displeasure, but she kissed his hand and ran to hide herself in the darkness, like a martin in its hole.

Finally, on the first landing was the ceremonious Basilia, who, after making Don Rodrigo's son the customary three reverences, said respectfully:

"Let me offer my congratulations to the master. There is a grand visitor waiting for him in the parlor!"

"What is that woman saying?" the young man asked Don Trinidad sharply. "I wish to receive no visits unless it be that of Don Antonio Arregui, or of his seconds."

"Go upstairs, go upstairs," answered Don Trinidad, smiling. "I will not deny that the visitor in the parlor has come as a second, but it is as your second. Now you shall see, man; now you shall see!"

Manuel could not help quickening his steps at hearing these mysterious words, and he soon entered the parlor, followed, with great difficulty, by the obese and breathless Don Trinidad Muley.

A cry of mingled wonder, pain, and rage issued from the hapless young man's breast at seeing who was the visitor who had been thus announced to him; and from the heart of the good priest came a sigh of terror and despair, on observing the irreverent and impious attitude of his former godson in so solemn and exceptional a case.

For the visitor was the Child Jesus, or the Child of the Ball, of the Church of Santa Maria, the same image which the young man had adored for so many years, and which had been carried in the procession that afternoon.

There he was on his frame of gold and silver; on an altar improvised at the head of the room, clad in costly tissue, lighted by numerous tapers, and

adorned with beautiful bunches of natural flowers. The standard of the Brotherhood, suspended from the ceiling, served him as a canopy, and finally, on a table in the middle of the room, on a golden salver, was a paper rolled up like a diploma, and tied with colored ribbons.

"What is this? Who has arranged this ridiculous scene?" asked Manuel at last, confronting Don Trinidad. "Do people think I am still a child? Do people think I am still a fool?"

The good spiritual father was in despair. He found strength, however, to control his grief, and, after closing the door of the room, he said to the blasphemer with the austere coldness of a judge:

"There is nothing new or extraordinary in this; this signifies that the Confraternity of the Child Jesus, of which you are a member, has appointed you its steward for the coming year, and that, in accordance with the ancient custom, which no one knows better than you, it has sent you the holy image so that it may remain a day in your house, and that you may bestow upon it whatever gifts you wish, as Superior Brother, which gifts it will display to-morrow afternoon at the dance of the raffle. But, even supposing that nothing of this were the case, how is it possible that you are not proud to see in your house the Child Jesus, the Son of the living God? How is it possible that you do not bend the knee before him and give him thanks for the high honor he bestows upon you? Are not

you his most fervent worshiper, his humblest servant, his most enthusiastic devotee?"

"No, Señor," answered Manuel lugubriously.

"Ah, wretch! And you tell that to me!" burst forth Don Trinidad with a fury as great as his grief. "And you tell it to me in his presence!"

Manuel folded his arms over his chest and made no answer.

"So that is what you have learned in your travels!" continued the priest, laying his hands upon the young man's shoulders. "So that is what you have gained by acquiring so much wealth? And you wished to leave it to me! You wished that I should distribute it among the poor! Neither the poor nor I want anything from a Jew!"

"Father," faltered Manuel, "moderate your anger. I am neither a Jew, nor a Moor, nor a Christian."

"What are you then, iniquitous man?"

"I am nothing," responded Manuel, lowering his eyelids and shrugging his shoulders, as if he were confessing a crime for which he did not hold himself responsible.

"Good Heavens! Good Heavens!" cried the priest, with indescribable terror.

And moving away from the man who had so deeply offended him, he sat down sidewise in a chair, with his back toward Venegas, and began to weep bitterly.

Manuel added in a grave voice:

"I ought not to have concealed the truth from you. Hear to the end what up to this time I have

never told anyone. I make no boast of this misfortune of mine, which I owe to the cruel teachings of the world, to what I have seen among peoples of different religions, to what I have read in works that ought never to have been written. I respect the beliefs of others, however, and you can comprehend that it would have been to mock them to accept hypocritically the office of steward of this image, when my heart yields him, now, no other homage than such as we give to the beloved dead."

"And I brought up this man!" groaned Don Trinidad, with greater anguish than before. "I called him my son! I loved him with my whole soul! Now I understand why he scorned all my counsels to-night! Now I know there is no hope for him! Who can steer a bark without a helm? Who can guide a horse without a bridle? I am conquered. His perdition is certain. Henceforward he will be the plaything of his passions. *Now he will belong to the latest comer!* Satan has triumphed! Child Jesus! Hear the prayer of this, thy humble servant—I desire to die. I desire to live no longer in so execrable a world. In pity let me die! Take me to thyself! Thy most holy mother will watch over Polonia, as Polonia has for forty-eight years watched over me. Ah, how different some people are from others! She nursed me for charity, seeing that my poor mother was sick, and that she could not afford a nurse. Then she gave me bread when there was not enough at home for all of us. She placed me as an apprentice in the pottery. She has

served me without return, through charity, ever since my mother died, and I was left alone. She has been for me, in short, what I have been for this soulless wretch! Child Jesus! Virgin most pure! dispose as you will of two poor old creatures, who have never denied you, and if we have ever done any good in this world, accept it as an offering, that you may touch the heart of the unfortunate Manuel Venegas!

As veracious historians it is incumbent upon us to say that this humble and disconnected prayer affected the young unbeliever profoundly; not because it told him anything strange to him, but because the pious tears of the good have more power to move, than all the reasonings of philosophy—especially when they fall on a feeling and generous heart. If Don Trinidad had employed theological arguments, Manuel could have answered him with rationalist arguments, as we see happen every day, but against the panegyric of Polonia, for example, no objection was possible.

Thus it was that Manuel approached his godfather and said to him, removing his hands and wiping the good man's eyes with his handkerchief:

"Come, father, don't cry any more, your tears are killing me! Consider that I have been for many hours defending myself against your affection, your irresistible kindness, the honeyed sweetness of your words, and it would be taking too great an advantage of the love and respect I entertain for you, to continue attacking me in this way!"

Don Trinidad seized the hand with which the young man was wiping away his tears, and looking at him, half-smiling, half-tearful, like a petted child, he cried coaxingly:

"But at least look at him, man! Don't insult him by turning your back upon him. Remember that he is my God, the God of your fathers, the God of your country, who has come to visit you! Remember that he will be greatly afflicted by your slights!"

Manuel, in whom, apparently, superstition had survived faith—supposing him ever to have had genuine faith—tried to turn his head toward the Infant Jesus, but he had not the courage to do so. He gave a shudder and deliberately closed his eyes.

But it was fated that extraordinary coincidences were to occur on this day. We say this, because at that moment Manuel and the priest heard, in the very room in which they were, the soft crying of a child.

Manuel looked with terror at Don Trinidad, believing that it was the Infant Jesus who was crying.

Don Trinidad smiled sadly and pointed to the door of the room, which had just opened, and outside which stood Señá María Josefa, with a beautiful boy in her arms, not daring to enter.

"Don't begin to think of miracles, either real or pretended," said the priest at the same moment to Manuel. "There is no miracle here but such as your own good heart may work. You see before

you the son of Soledad, who has come to ask your forgiveness for his parents."

"Her son!" roared Manuel, retreating to the other end of the vast apartment. "This, too! Ah, tyrants! Are you resolved upon killing me? Are you resolved upon turning me mad?"

And with these words he struck the wall with his clenched hands, as if he wished to beat it down and escape from this perilous ambushade, into which his heart had fallen.

"Manuel, calm yourself!" said Don Trinidad, approaching him gently. "I am not your tyrant—it is yourself who are that, and mine also, and that of this poor family, who ask you for mercy."

"Take away that vile offspring of treachery and deceit and hide him out of everyone's sight!" cried the madman, without turning round or moving from the wall.

The child began to cry afresh.

"A great exploit truly!" cried Don Trinidad Muley, "to abuse a poor child! To frighten him! To turn him from your door!"

"I will not see him!" roared the young man. "If I saw him I should kill him."

"You have almost killed him. You have already made him ill," said the grandmother sadly. "His mother has been suckling him on poison, instead of milk, since she heard that you were coming, and to-night she took him to my house hungry and suffering, as if it were his fault that you do not think yourself happy!"

"But why has not his father come in his stead?" replied Venegas, with desperation. "Why has not the coward come who has robbed me of my happiness? Why does he shun me? Why does he hide himself?"

Don Trinidad made a sign to Señá Maria to be silent, and hastened to make answer himself in these terms:

"Let us suppose that this honest man fears you—has he not more than enough cause to do so? Must all the world be as sanguinary as you are? Is one to allow one's self to be killed by the first desperate man who provokes a quarrel with one? For, Manuel, let us speak plainly, what rights have you over Soledad? What promise did she ever give you? And, at any rate, what have you to expect from her now? Do you think her so unworthy that for you she would dishonor herself and dishonor her husband?"

"Soledad has no husband! Soledad is mine! Soledad loves me!" exclaimed Venegas fanatically, turning with a defiant air toward his interlocutors.

"Answer him you, Señora," said Don Trinidad to Señá María Josefa.

"Manuel," said the mother, hiding her grandson from view as she spoke, "my daughter loved you once. I will not deny it; and don't think it was distasteful to me that she should love you. But she is an honest woman, and, having married another man, you neither can nor ought to expect anything from her now."

"It is a lie! Soledad is not married!" cried Manuel desperately. "Her marriage is null! Soledad has never ceased to love me! I know what her divine tears told me to-day!"

"You are mistaken, Manuel," continued the mother. "Soledad will never be false to her duties as a wife. Your presence in this town can only be the cause of misery to everyone, and in no way of happiness either to you or to her. The only boon you can confer upon my daughter—and which you will confer upon her, since you love her so dearly—is to go away, to leave her in peace; not to bring ruin upon her house. And that is what this little angel and I have come here to ask you! That is what we humbly beseech you!"

"Let her come to speak to me herself!" replied Manuel, with indescribable arrogance. "You shall see that she will not ask me to go away! I know her. Her heart is mine—mine only! Mine since she was eight years of age!"

"What you say is madness, Manuel!" replied Señá María. "How can a married woman come to see you? And her streaming tears told you plainly enough to-day her desire that you should forget her, that you should forgive her, that you should forgive us all! Soledad did not cry for the reason you thought. Soledad cried because she was afraid, as this poor child is crying."

"Afraid!" repeated the young man mockingly. "That is another lie! Soledad is not afraid of me—and she is right. Soledad knows me! It is her

cowardly tyrant who is afraid! It is you, who did not prevent her marriage, who are afraid. It is that child—who should not be called Soledad's child, since he is not my child—who is afraid. And all three of you do well to tremble! Ah, my first idea was the right one! The death of Antonio Arregui will settle everything! You will keep that foundling, the child of crime, and I will go away with my adored one! I will kill Antonio, then; I will kill him, though I should have to do it in the very church! I will kill him, though the whole world should unite in trying to prevent me!"

"What does this mean?" burst forth Don Trinidad at last, full of anger and indignation. "This is to insult me to my very face! If I do not strike you this very instant, it is because we are in the presence of the Infant Jesus! But I will go away. I despise you! I renounce you! A fine reception you have given me in your house, the first time I enter it!"

"Manuel—I implore you on my knees," said the venerable woman at the same time, throwing herself at the feet of Don Rodrigo's son. "A poor mother begs it of you, by the memory of her who bore you—leave the town! Have pity upon this innocent child! Or, if you intend to make him an orphan, kill him at once! I deliver him up to you. Here he is!"

And so saying, she placed the child at the young man's feet, with that inspired rashness of which only women's souls and mothers' hearts are capable.

"Come, Señora, let us leave this monster!" resumed Don Trinidad. "We will go to the authorities. I myself will have him put in prison. Farewell, unworthy son of Don Rodrigo Venegas! I go, because your disrespectful conduct forces me out of your house. I go, because I believe you capable of laying violent hands upon me, if I should chastise you as you deserve. Farewell! Our relations are at an end. Would that I had never seen you!"

"Manuel, don't listen to him! listen to me!" cried Soledad's mother, dragging herself to the feet of the young man, who stood as if petrified, his hair on end, his clenched hands pressed against his forehead. "Do not believe him, Manuel! Don Trinidad loves you more than he loves his life! He is your second father! And I also love you; and this child loves you, too. See—see how he smiles at you!"

"Enough!" cried Manuel at last, in heart-rending accents, throwing wide his arms and flinging back his head. "Enough, cruel executioners, who have charged yourselves with the task of torturing me. Leave me now! Go! Leave the room! I command you—I warn you—I beseech you! Leave me alone, if you do not wish that your blood and mine should form a lake in this room! Take away from my presence the son of the cowardly thief who has robbed me of my happiness! Go, Señora; go, Señor Rector; I know that I am no longer master of myself, that I may do a deed that will horrify the world!"

There was that in Manuel's voice, as he uttered these words, that caused Señá María Josefa to rise to her feet in terror, with her grandson in her arms, and glide silently toward the door, walking backward, her eyes fixed immovably on that dreadful face, more like the face of a tiger than of a man.

Even Don Trinidad was terrified; not on his own account, but on that of the child, of the old woman, and of the young man himself, who seemed to be either dying or going mad, to judge by the heaving of his chest, the swollen veins of his forehead, the wildness of his eyes; and, knowing besides, that he had no further arguments to employ, nor had the unhappy man strength to bear more, he, too, withdrew slowly, looking at Manuel with profound pity, unmixed with even the remembrance of his past anger.

In this attitude he went out of the room, the door of which he left ajar.

Manuel remained alone with the Infant Jesus.

CHAPTER V.

THE DEW OF THE SOUL.

THE watchman had just called the hour of midnight, when Don Trinidad and Señá María Josefa withdrew from the room, leaving in the hand of the famous image of the Child of the Ball the solution of the supreme spiritual crisis at which Manuel Venegas had arrived.

From this time forward there reigned throughout the house profound silence, broken only by the cautious steps of the vigilant priest, who from time to time approached the door to observe Manuel through the crack, and by the whisperings of the women gathered in the kitchen.

Among them was Polonia, who had found it impossible to control her restlessness and anxiety, while in the other house Soledad's child had fallen asleep in its grandmother's arms, after Basilia had quieted it with some cakes. La Volanta, by dint of hypocritical tears, had succeeded in dispelling Don Trinidad's prejudices, and she also formed part of this species of reception of sick nurses, where they must be telling so many good stories. And finally, the Malagan muleteer was snoring in the courtyard, uncomfortably seated in a hard chair, as the gravity of the occasion required.

Manuel's first act, when he found himself alone, was to extinguish the candles that lighted the Child Jesus, the room thus remaining in utter darkness.

This greatly distressed Don Trinidad, who had still set some hopes on his ward's former devotion to the beautiful image in whose company he had left him. But presently he reflected that the very act of putting out the lights might indicate, on the young man's part, a species of terror of that ghost of his dead faith, and this judicious reflection could not but console him to some extent.

Manuel began to walk up and down in the darkness.

From time to time he stood still, and unintelligible monosyllables, hollow groans, or smothered moans issued from his lips, as if two distinct persons, each rivaling the other in fierceness, kept up within him an obstinate controversy.

The young man was, no doubt, living over again, in his imagination, all the emotions he had experienced in the course of that day; no doubt memory brought before him again the excitement and agitation of the public; the street of Santa María de la Cabeza; the unexpected apparition of Soledad; her fearlessness, her beauty, the glance of love she had given him, her copious and most bitter tears; the meeting with Don Trinidad Muley; the pious acclamations of the crowd; the holy words of the benevolent priest, his tears, his caresses; the visit of the Child Jesus, the ostentatious impiety with which he had received him; the grief which this had

caused the good spiritual father; the appearance of Soledad's mother and child; the aged woman's dignified language; the tears and the smile of the innocent child, and the insults and threats of the offended priest, of his generous protector, of the being whom he most loved in the world.

Now, then, all these affectionate words, all these pious counsels, these solemn admonitions, these tender entreaties, these sweet tears, these outbursts of an offended father's anger must have softened even the heart of a wild beast. Therefore it was, no doubt, that he moaned, in the midst of his rage, like a wounded lion; therefore it was that he battled thus fiercely with himself; and for this reason, and this only, Don Trinidad Muley left him alone, seeing very clearly that not one of all his efforts to vanquish him had been useless; that they were all working in the young man's rebellious spirit, in that this spirit wavered, doubted, retreated, returned to the fight, retreated again, and might at any moment end by surrendering. But alas for righteousness! alas for peace! alas for the good priest's charitable undertaking, if the young man failed to surrender in this fierce contest! For then there would remain for him no hope of salvation!

The struggle was long—the hours of anguish are so long—between pride and humility, anger and patience, passion and virtue, self-love and self-abnegation, selfishness and charity, between the beast and the man.

At about two o'clock Manuel no longer walked

up and down the room, nor roared, nor moaned. Only deep sighs broke from his breast from time to time, and soon these also ceased.

But might it not be that it was his malady, only, that had died? Might it not be that Manuel Venegas had just been reborn to reason, to justice, to the dignity of humanity, to the life of the conscience?

In this doubt the priest relinquished the idea, which he had for a moment entertained, of taking a light and entering the room.

Very soon he had cause to rejoice for having waited; for before long he observed a thing which seemed to him symbolical and of great significance, in spite of its commonplace simplicity, inasmuch as it reminded him of the ceremony with which the fire is lighted in the church, on the morning of Easter Saturday.

This was that Manuel suddenly gave signs of being both alive and awake, proceeding to strike a light by means of steel, flint, tinder, and sulphur, according to the custom of that epoch.

"Lumen Christi!" murmured Don Trinidad, crossing himself.

Having obtained a light the young man applied it to the candles which he had before extinguished; with which the Child of God was once more brilliantly illuminated, and the spacious apartment remained as bright as if it were noonday.

Our hero now seated himself in front of the image, and gazed at it with profound and peaceful sadness.

The storm had passed, leaving behind it, on the now tranquil face of that man of iron, deep and ineffaceable traces. It seemed as if he had lived ten years in those two hours. Without being old, he had ceased to be young; his features had taken on that settled look of ascetic melancholy which marks the faces of the disappointed.

More; the sorrowful gaze which rested caressingly on the image of the Child Jesus had in it none of the sweetness of joy. It was a look of calm and cureless grief, like the look with which, after years of cruel loss and bitter suffering, we regard the likeness of a dead child, or of the parents who left us in orphanhood, or of an early love with whom departed the fairest bloom of our soul.

"He does not pray! he does not weep!" thought Don Trinidad bitterly, formulating in his own fashion the thoughts which we have just expressed.

And he left his hiding-place with a disquietude much greater than had been the joy which the young man's first glance at his early patron had caused him.

"They are not making up!" the priest went on, after a moment, expressing his sorrow in another form. "And yet Manuel is giving plain signs that it is his wish to do so. Mysteries of God! What trouble would it cost that Child to open his arms now to my godson, as he once opened them to St. Anthony of Padua? That would take us all out of our difficulties!"

And he again approached the crack of the door

and began to pray fervently to the beautiful image, as if exhorting him to work a miracle of the possibility of which he had no doubt.

"It is of no use! He doesn't heed me!" he said to himself at last, seeing that the Child Jesus did not even move an eyelid. "Doubtless it would not be best! Let us respect the will of God! And who am I, a miserable sinner, to pretend to give advice to the images of my parish? If they followed it, I would be the saint, not they. You are right, my Child! You are very right to pay no heed to me!"

Manuel had meanwhile risen to his feet.

The sadness depicted on his countenance was deeper than ever. A profound sigh escaped from his breast, and he passed both hands across his forehead, as if to cast from his mind new images of anguish.

He looked like a criminal in chapel, on the night preceding his execution. The resignation of despair was beginning to envelop him in its funereal pall.

At the further end of the room stood some large chests which he had brought with him from America. Manuel opened the largest of these and took from it a shell box, which he placed on a small table.

For a moment Don Trinidad feared that the young man was going to kill himself, and he prepared to enter the apartment.

But he was soon tranquilized on perceiving that what Manuel sought in the box was not pistols,

but beautiful jewels—necklaces, ear-rings, bracelets, rings, brooches—a treasure, in short, of pearls, diamonds, emeralds, and other precious stones.

“They are the gifts which he intended to give Soledad on the day of their marriage! They are the wedding-presents that the unfortunate boy brought for her!” thought the priest, filled with commiseration.

Manuel contemplated one by one these post-humous galas, those gems now without a purpose, those emblems of his unhappiness; and then, carrying out the idea which had no doubt moved him to so painful a performance, he proceeded to adorn with the jewels the sacred image of which he was the steward, and which consequently he was obliged to receive hospitably.

Don Trinidad Muley was unable to contain his enthusiasm and his joy, and he ran on tiptoe to call the old women to contemplate this pious scene.

Let the reader picture to himself, then, the emotion, the whispered comments, and the sweet tears that there were outside the door, while Manuel fastened to the garments of the Child Jesus, or hung around his neck and arms, these relics of the shipwreck of so many loving hopes. These things are felt or they are not felt, but they cannot be described.

Suffice it to say, that they all exclaimed, with pious joy, embracing one another affectionately:

“He is saved! He has resolved to forgive! A few hours more and he will have gone away forever.

God grant that he may be happier in the future than he has ever been in the past!"

While Don Trinidad and the three good old women spoke thus, the perfidious Volanta, who had seen and heard everything, crawled downstairs, like a beetle, unnoticed by anyone, and slipped out into the street, taking care not to waken the improvised porter.

And how could those who were upstairs observe this occurrence, when their souls were at the time hanging on the movements of Manuel, who had just performed another act that left not the shadow of a doubt as to his noble and pacific intentions?

Such was the sublime outburst of humility in which, taking from his pocket the exquisite Indian dagger that he had worn at the procession that afternoon, he unsheathed it, raised it to a level with his face, gazed at its shining blade and its rich handle, then kissed it and placed it at the feet of the Child Jesus.

Had it not been for the blind faith which Don Trinidad Muley had in the young man's redemption, he would have trembled for his life, as the women trembled, on seeing him thus raise the dagger, and he would not have prevented them, as he did, from rushing at once into the room. And it required all the priest's authority afterward, to restrain them from breaking into cries of holy joy, on beholding that solemn abdication of the intensest pride that ever found a lodgment in the human heart.

"Be silent! Be silent!" the author of this prodigious work whispered to them. "Let him be! God is with him! Let us not arouse the demon of pride, who lies sleeping, and who will soon have died in the heart of my good son!"

Manuel looked at what he had done, and his grave countenance expressed a thoughtful and melancholy complacency, but by no means that active, direct, personal devotion which the good women imagined, and whose triumphant and joyful splendors Don Trinidad Muley would have wished to behold in the eyes of the vanquished lion.

"That is not *faith*! That is only *charity*!" said the unlearned spiritual father, giving ear, as always, to the voice of his loyal heart. "My work, it may be, will remain incomplete. Accursed be the men who have dried up the fountains of joy in so good a soul! So long as Manuel does not believe, he will have no happiness of his own, and his only joy will be in seeing others happy!"

Don Rodrigo's son here took out his watch and looked at the hour. But he probably found that it had stopped, for he immediately afterward opened a window looking toward the east, and commanding a view of the whole plain, seemingly to consult the position of the stars.

He then ran to the door of the room and, without opening it, he clapped his hands twice in succession, as if calling someone.

"Let me go in!" murmured Don Trinidad, motioning to the women to retire.

And he entered the spacious apartment.

"Do you wish anything?" he asked Manuel gently.

Whether from shyness, weariness, or the childish resentment which patients, who have just undergone a surgical operation, cherish for a time toward the surgeon who has in reality saved their life, our youthful hero evaded the priest's gaze, and said quickly:

"Send Basilia here."

Don Trinidad retired without manifesting the slightest offense.

Basilia entered the room a few moments afterward.

"Is the Malagan muleteer there?" Manuel asked her, with the abrupt intonation of one who desires a speedy and brief answer.

"He is below," returned the housekeeper, trembling.

"Tell him, then, to load the donkeys with all my baggage, and to saddle my horse. It is half-past three. I shall set out at five. Let them come to take away those chests—but let no one speak to me. Beg Don Trinidad, on my part, to eat something and to go to bed. I wish to be alone."

Saying which he went out into the balcony, through the window that he had just opened, where he remained with his back turned toward the room, while Basilia and Polonia, weeping silently, carried out the trunks, and Don Trinidad and Señá María Josefa also wept in the hall outside, and from

thence threw grateful kisses to the image of the Child Jesus.

At the end of an hour day began to dawn.

Manuel then quitted the balcony, and placing a chair in the middle of the now solitary apartment, he seated himself, and remained gazing at the sky with the air of resigned expectance of the hero condemned to death, who watches the dawning of the last day of his existence.

He remained thus for a long time, plunged in an ecstasy of gentle melancholy, which lent an ever-increasing beauty to his noble countenance. The wild beast had acquired the face of a man. The man before long acquired the face of an angel. It seemed as if his soul was holding communion with the infinite.

It was now quite day. Five o'clock had struck, then half-past five. The mules were laden, and the horse stood saddled. But no one ventured to tell him so; no one ventured to break in upon that ineffable ecstasy, in which the young man seemed to enjoy in advance the recompense of his abnegation, the reward of his sacrifice.

At last the sun rose, and its first ray penetrated into the room, bathing with fulgent light the peaceful face of Manuel Venegas.

"Soledad!" at this moment cried the parrot in the balcony, where it had remained forgotten.

Manuel trembled convulsively on hearing this name, with which the American bird had greeted the sunrise every day, for many years past, and a

world of memories and disappointed hopes reappeared before his vision, drawing him down from Heaven to earth, from eternity to time, from oblivion to reality. But lacking now the pride to struggle against his adverse fate, a mortal anguish oppressed his heart, a languor, never before experienced, took possession of his whole being, he stretched out his arms like one who is drowning—and it even seemed as if he were really calling for help—until at last he burst into bitter sobs, followed by copious tears.

Having broken down for the first time in his life the dyke which held back his tears, they gushed forth with such violence that soon his face, his hands, and his heaving breast were bathed with them. At first they were like scorching lava, then a beneficent and saving outlet to his overfull heart, and, finally, a gentle dew which descended from heaven to assuage the thirst of his unhappy soul.

Don Trinidad ran to him, and, wrapping his mantle piously around him, said:

“Weep, weep, my son! Weep all you wish! Weep in the arms of your father!”

Manuel clung to the neck of the priest and covered his face with kisses, saying to him, between gentle sighs:

“Forgive me! Forgive me!”

“Forgive me, you!” sobbed Don Trinidad.

And the women, too, beginning to invade the apartment, gave free vent to their tears, and the very muleteer, who had come in for the parrot, beat

his head with his fists, saying with profound emotion:

"What a pity of the man! A curse upon the first woman!"

"Father, I adore her!" meanwhile cried Manuel, shut off from the spectators by Don Trinidad's cloak.

"And I you!" answered the priest, kissing him repeatedly. "Do you wish me to go with you?"

"No—no! I will go alone!"

"Well, then, be very good; be very charitable, and you shall see how happy you will be. Here," he added presently, in a lower voice; "take this; take your fortune. There are poor everywhere."

"No, father," answered Manuel. "Keep that—and do what I told you. Those papers explain everything."

"He is confessing himself," said the women, going out into the hall.

"But you will live. You will write to me this time," murmured Don Trinidad. "Will you not?"

"Yes, Señor, I will live as long as it is possible for me to do so," answered the young man, drying his tears.

And embracing the priest for the last time, he rose and said:

"Let us go."

Polonia then approached him, holding the end of her apron to her eyes.

"Forgive me, Polonia!" exclaimed the young man, embracing her.

"God be with you, my son," responded the old woman. "You are now cured, and you may be happy! Your malady consisted in never having shed tears!"

"A good journey, Señor," said Basilia, kissing his hand.

"Come, you too, Señá María Josefa," cried Don Trinidad, at the same time. "But don't leave the child behind you. To-day there is forgiveness for all!"

"Oh, no!" said Manuel, drawing back.

"Manuel, chastise yourself!" exclaimed the priest. "The more you humble yourself now, the happier you will be to-morrow, with the remembrance of this day! Tear your pride from your heart by the roots while the soil is still soft, so that it may never spring up again. Do not carry any venom in your conscience, now that you have washed it clean with your tears."

"Manuel!" said Señá María Josefa, "it would have made me very happy to have called myself your mother. The Señor Rector knows it well."

Manuel took off his watch and gave it to the child, hanging around his neck the long golden chain to which it was attached, and uttered these words:

"I forgive your mother! God grant that you may be happier than Manuel Venegas!"

And he turned his back upon them and drew away a few steps, as if to intimate his wish that Soledad's mother and son should retire.

The poor grandmother left the room drowned in

tears, while the child went away, kissing the watch and smiling angelically.

Don Trinidad followed Manuel to the middle of the apartment, and, pointing to the image of the Child Jesus, refulgent in the sunlight, owing to the multitude of rich jewels adorning his figure, asked him in a tone of entreaty:

"And he? What do you say to him in farewell?"

"I would ask him to come to life, and push away the stone from the sepulcher of my heart, if such a miracle were possible!" answered Manuel sadly.

"God grant it may be!" said the priest, raising his eyes to heaven. "The roots of your early faith are still living, and the sap of regeneration has already begun to course through them. The maxims which your father and I inculcated in your soul, when you were a child, have germinated anew under the auspicious influence of this image of the Redeemer of the world. You owe gratitude, then, to the friend of your childhood; and although to-day you see in his sweet image only a shadow, a picture, a memory of the affection you once entertained for him, and which he still entertains for you; although the new light, which already illuminates the loftiest heights of your spirit, has not yet penetrated to your clouded reason—kiss him, Manuel! You lose nothing by kissing him! Kiss him, and you will see that all the pride which has remained in your spirit will dissolve in tears, as the pride of your heart has dissolved. You shall see how, on pressing your lips to the bare feet of the

Child, in whose divinity your father and your mother believed, you will know that you are performing a holy action and you will once more shed tears of happiness! What would it cost you to try? Why do you not venture? Does not that very fear tell you that the act of submission I propose to you is attended with marvelous results? Come, see, I will set you the example, as when you were a boy. I will kiss him first. That's the way you do!—so! And then you say—with tears, like me: 'Blessed be thou, Jesus crucified! Blessed be thy most holy mother! Blessed be thy Heavenly Father, who sent thee on earth to redeem us!'"

Manuel closed his eyes and fell upon his knees, as a tower which has been undermined falls to the ground.

The two old women and the Malagan were also on their knees, praying fervently and returning thanks to God, on seeing that the young man was clasping the feet of the Child of the Ball and covering them with tears and kisses.

On his knees, too, was Don Trinidad Muley, whom even the most hardened unbeliever would assuredly have cheerfully embraced at that moment; for the truth is that in all this there was nothing that could harm anyone or anything, and much that was good for everyone and everything; or else we do not know what is good and what is bad in this miserable life!

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We will not attempt to describe the last moments

spent by Manuel Venegas in his house, nor the repeated and most sorrowful adieus exchanged between those simple and tender-hearted beings. We should fear to distress too greatly, by so doing, those of our readers who, since they have not yet laid down this true history, in which homage is rendered to poverty or humility of spirit, no doubt have the happiness of thinking and feeling as did Don Trinidad Muley. We prefer, then, to go into the Plaza and mingle there with the crowd, in whose company we may observe more tranquilly the solemn departure of Manuel Venegas, and the dramatic events to which it gave rise.

CHAPTER VI.

TRIUMPHAL MARCH.

THE morning was a most beautiful one, especially for those happy mortals whose minds were not engaged in the contemplation of their own dark passions or those of others, but who had chosen rather to go into the country to rejoice their eyes and their souls by the spectacle of the sublime temple of Nature, of the variegated earth, full of marvels, the brilliant vault of the sky, and the clear mirror of a conscience pure enough to be able to reflect the mysterious lights of the infinite.

Not of this humor were the many persons who had assembled on that fatal Monday, the 6th of April, 1840, in the great square of the town, to learn what progress grief and anger had made during the night in the hearts of Manuel Venegas and Antonio Arregui. Nor need it be said that the group in which most excitement was manifested about other people's affairs was that gathered, as usual, at the door of the pharmacy—terrible customhouse through which the Child of the Ball must pass on his way out of the town!

Vitriol was more bitter and ferocious than ever; unable to keep silent for a moment, notwithstanding the repeated remonstrances of his disciples, and, if

he by chance paused in his remarks, it was to say to those who came to buy medicines:

"We are out of that!" or, "Come back later!" or, "Tell the patient he will die; this medicine he has been ordered is good for nothing!"

Certain it is that he never left the aforesaid group, in the midst of which he had been thundering for a long time against the imbecility of Manuel, "whose house," he said, "the priest of Santa María had filled with saints and old women, in order to turn him from the path of decency and honor, and make him break his famous oaths."

Presently he added:

"According to the information I have received, at three this morning he had him already conquered, and the poor wretch was repeating the Confiteor at the feet of the Child Jesus, after presenting him with a lot of jewels, at the entreaties of Don Trinidad, who is like an ant for his church. Poor Manuel! if his high-spirited father could come to life again!"

His auditors exchanged looks, as if doubtful of the aptness of this apostrophe, and Vitriol, who observed this, turned down that leaf and opened another.

"As for Soledad's husband," he exclaimed emphatically, "it must be confessed that he is a brave man! You all saw what he did yesterday. He went, without even waiting to take off his spurs, to the hermitage of Santa Luparia, in search of the famous Hector, whom Don Trinidad Muley had hid-

✓ den in a closet! I have no doubt but that when he knows, as he probably does by this time, that his mother-in-law and his son have spent the night in the house of his wife's lover, he will go to demand satisfaction from the latter, and will defeat all the maneuvers of fanaticism and cowardice."

Many persons retired, greatly disgusted with this energumen, and went to join other groups where the marvelous, and now public scenes which had taken place in the ancient precentor's house, should be more charitably discussed. Vitriol, however, was not disconcerted, but, jeering at those who had left him, went on to speak as follows:

"Of course Antonio Arregui will go in any case this afternoon to the ~~raffle~~, to take up his rival's glove. So he swore yesterday, when he learned that Don Rodrigo's son had the audacity to go knock at his door last night, while he was in the Sierra. I have it on very good authority. Consequently, if the Child of the Ball, who made all those threats eight years ago, should leave the town without presenting himself in the palestra, it will be so much the worse for his honor and fame. It is true that our poor townsman may not yet be aware of the fact—and it would be rendering him a great service to inform him of it—that Antonio Arregui went yesterday, evidently with the intention of challenging him, to the chapel of Santa Luparia. In short, it is to the honor of this town that the affair should not be left unsettled in the indecorous manner desired by Muley! What would the Rio-

jans say if the hero of the town should run away from one of themselves? They would say that we Andalusians have no blood in our veins! And all for what? Because the priests have sucked out the brains of a sort of half-crazy savage, loaded down with millions, with the object of getting his money from him! I tell you that it makes me blush to see such indecent fraud!"

"And it makes me blush to see you wear the garb of a human being!" exclaimed the captain, who had arrived a moment before. "You are an insect!"

Vitriol burst into a laugh.

"Don't laugh;" continued the veteran, trembling with rage. "I warn you that I have come here to-day with the determination to squelch you, if you do not cease to poison the air with your vile calumnies!"

"Threats and all!" replied the pharmacist contemptuously. "Have they bought you too? Has one of the jewels bestowed on the wooden Child fallen to your share? Well, I wish you joy of it!"

And he turned his back upon the captain, frightened at what he had said.

"You shall see this very instant what has fallen to my share!" roared the captain. "Take that, in the name of the army!"

And he bestowed upon the insolent materialist a vigorous kick on the vilest part of his anatomy.

The poor atheist put his hands to the injured part and fled, saying:

"Ah! the same thing as always! Militarism!"

Cæsarism! Brute force! The secular arm of tyranny!"

"There was no arm at all, my good Papaveris," said Paco Antunez, refusing him the assistance he had gone to ask of him. "The caress was given with the foot, and it was a good one!"

And he moved scornfully away from him.

This incident, which made everyone who witnessed it laugh heartily, was the signal for and the beginning of the great defeat which Vitriol was destined to suffer that memorable morning, in view of all his disciples.

We say this because at that moment the famous baggage-laden mules, led by the Malagan muleteer—who was in high spirits, thinking himself already on his way to the Indies—began to issue from the door of Manuel's house.

The emotion of the public, on seeing this material proof that Manuel was going away, that Don Trinidad had triumphed, that the wild beast had forgiven, was, with very few exceptions, profound as well as noble and joyful.

"Manuel is going away," said some. "Don Trinidad is beyond price. There is what may be called a good Christian."

"Manuel is going away," exclaimed others. "The truth is that there is something miraculous in this *dénouement*."

"The Venegases were always that way," said the old bun-seller of the Plaza. "They seem to have a special gift for arousing the enthusiasm of the pub-

lic. This morning reminds me of that other morning, when Don Rodrigo saved Don Elias's papers from the fire which no one would extinguish. We all applauded then without knowing why, and the same thing is happening again now. Look! The people are crying; the children are dancing for joy; the women are looking out of the windows. I am going to tell my wife——"

"It's a pity to let money go out of the town!" they were at the same time saying in another group, alluding to the three voluminous mule loads. "Take care but there must be lots of ounces there!"

In the interim, Vitriol, forgetting his injury, as the general forgets his wounds until the battle is over, now desperate and almost on the verge of a convulsion, approached the triumphant muleteer, and asked him with indescribable anguish:

"When is your master going to set out? Will he delay much longer? Will there be time to say a few words to him?"

"How should there be, man?" responded the Malagan, in the midst of his discordant shouts. "But what there is in this town is a priest who has more power in it than God!"

And taking off his hat he tossed it into the air, crying out, in the middle of the Plaza, with inexpressible spirit and humor:

"Gentlemen, hurrah for Don Trinidad Muley!"

"Hurrah!" enthusiastically responded more than a thousand voices.

Nor were there wanting those who, on the instant,

invited Señor Francisco Cataduras to partake of brandy and buns, in return for "the justice he had done one of the most illustrious sons of that calumniated town."

From that moment the battle was completely lost for Vitriol. All the public sided with our friend the rector, applauded his work, breathed the grateful atmosphere of the good, gave its sanction to the pacific retreat of Manuel Venegas.

And at this time it was that Soledad's unhappy lover appeared on horseback, at the door of what, for a few short hours, had been his home.

A murmur of deep compassion rose from the multitude.

Manuel advanced, rigid, crimson, silent, looking at the sky, in order not to look at the earth, accompanied by Don Trinidad Muley, who walked on his right, and who addressed to him from time to time some word of consolation.

The scene resembled, in every particular, the mournful march of a ~~condemned criminal to the scaffold.~~

The people saluted him with a certain embarrassment, as he passed each successive group; but, after a few moments, with a simultaneous movement, they uncovered themselves, as if they were in the presence of a king.

Just then an incident occurred of which only a few persons took notice. The notorious Volanta attempted to approach Manuel Venegas on the side opposite that on which Don Trinidad walked; and

it was even seen that she held a paper in her hands, which might be taken for a begging letter. But the priest, who observed her, passed quickly over to that side, and spoke to the vile old woman with such fury in his looks and voice that she hurried away to hide herself among the crowd.

Manuel noticed nothing, but pursued his triumphal march, mute, motionless, apathetic, immovable upon his horse, like the dead body of the Cid, and conquering, like him, in that posthumous battle from which his spirit was absent.

In this manner he was passing in front of the door of the apothecary's shop, to the profound grief of Vitriol, who was going to shut himself up there with his defeat, when a great commotion was observed on the other side of the Plaza, and Antonio Arregui, livid with rage, was seen to run, first to the house in which Venegas had resided, and then in his pursuit, some evil-disposed person having informed him that the horseman was the enemy he was seeking.

But Don Trinidad's vigilance never slept, and leaving Manuel, he flew to meet the indignant Arregui, who, it is but just to say, had been stopped at the same time by several other well-intentioned persons, from whose grasp he was now trying to release himself.

Don Trinidad required but few words to explain to Antonio how and why his mother-in-law and his child had come to spend the night in the house of the Indian, and few also to make him see how

inopportune, and even sacrilegious, was the step which he desired to take; attacking a brave and repentant man who was now flying from the combat, believing it to be unjust, criminal, and imprudent, and leaving his country forever.

Arregui was astounded when he heard this extraordinary and unlooked-for news, and as he had a great and a good heart, and as Don Trinidad was the able man we already know him to be, and as the fickle public that day threw its whole weight into the scale of good, a thing happened which would otherwise have been incomprehensible.

But first let us tell what had meantime occurred to Manuel Venegas.

The moment Don Trinidad had left him Vitriol ran and took the rector's place, audaciously seizing the bridle of the horse, and stopping him with one hand, while he held out the other to the Child of the Ball, saying to him in a low voice:

"A good journey, neighbor! Didn't you want to see Antonio Arregui? Well, there he is behind you, struggling with the priest, who is trying in vain to hold him back. It looks as if the Riojan was determined upon attacking you!"

The hated name of Soledad's husband awoke Manuel from his stupor, and he heard Vitriol's last words. He turned his horse quickly, then asking, with eyes flashing fire:

"Where? where is he?"

And he found himself face to face with Don Trin-

idad Muley, who was coming to rejoin him, and who said to him in majestic accents:

"My son, complete your work. Remember our conversation. This is Don Antonio Arregui. I entreat you to ask his forgiveness."

Arregui was a few steps behind the priest, haughty, dignified, ready either for peace or for war, although involuntarily admiring the noble, beautiful, and grief-stricken countenance, that he now saw for the first time, and perhaps compassionating its owner's unmerited misfortunes.

Manuel gazed bitterly at the husband of Soledad, and hesitated for a few moments, between the two tremendous abysses which his evil destiny once more opened before him.

A profound silence, pregnant with horror, reigned, then, throughout the Plaza. The seconds seemed centuries.

"Think of me! Think of who you are! Think of the Child Jesus!" murmured Don Trinidad, raising his outspread hands toward the young man in an attitude of supplication.

Manuel trembled from head to foot, as if, in renouncing his pride in this last, this supreme trial, he renounced life also, then, courteously taking off his hat, he saluted the man whom he had sworn to kill.

Arregui took off his hat almost at the same instant, responding nobly and cordially to his salutation.

A salvo of applause broke then from the crowd,

while deafening cries, bursting from thousands and thousands of throats, filled the air:

"Hurrah for Manuel Venegas!"

"Hurrah for Antonio Arregui!"

"Hurrah for Don Trinidad Muley!"

"Hurrah for the Child Jesus!"

Manuel had put spurs to his horse meanwhile, and disappeared like an exhalation; La Volanta, who ran after him, being unable to overtake him, or to stop him with her discordant shouts.

EPILOGUE.

CHAPTER I.

THE ARRIVAL OF DESAIX AT MARENGO.

VERY willingly would we have brought this work to a conclusion with the preceding chapter. The dignity of the human race, in so far as personages so imperfect and so obscure as Manuel Venegas and La Dolorosa can represent it, would have suffered nothing thereby, and our favorite readers—who, if they are not the most learned, and the best informed are not, on the other hand, the most evil-disposed—would have thanked us for it.

But to-day we have not the discretionary liberty of the novelist; to-day we are the slaves of facts, unhappily real and positive, and therefore we find ourselves in the hard necessity of relating here the tragical event which filled the town with mourning on that memorable day, and which went beyond even the desires of Vitriol himself and the romantic inclinations of the Madridlenian, —

Do not suppose, however, that the catastrophe referred to contradicts in reality, although it may do so in appearance, the salutary moral conveyed, in our judgment, by our story, as thus far narrated.

On the contrary, it serves it rather as immediate confirmation, showing how much in the right was Don Trinidad Muley, in saying to Manuel Venegas, when he learned that the latter had lost his religious faith, whose restoration *through feeling* only began afterward in his unhappy soul: "*Now you will belong to the latest comer !*" That is to say, now good will have no greater power over you than evil; now the narrow channel of obedience will no longer serve to confine your haughty will; now you will fall into every abyss which tempts you.

But let us leave these questions, philosophical and theological, whose solution is not incumbent upon us; and, keeping to our humble office of narrators of accomplished facts, return to that plaza of the Moorish town which our uncultured and impetuous protagonist had just left for his voluntary exile.

Very few persons now remained there. Antonio Arregui, with whose austerity of character we are acquainted, had made no delay in leaving the place, shunning idle or malicious talk. Don Trinidad Muley had followed his example, saying that he was going to bed, for, with all the agitation of the day, added to the grief of seeing his adored Manuel going away forever, he felt very ill and believed that he was threatened with a serious fever. The septuagenarian captain gave him his arm, and went with him, vowing never again to return to the door of the pharmacy. And with this the crowd dispersed and they all returned to their ordinary affairs, bidding one another good-by, however, "until the afternoon,

at the raffle," notwithstanding the scanty interest which the festival now had for them.

As for Vitriol, it seemed as if he had been seized by a sort of vertigo, for he did nothing but walk up and down, up and down, in the back shop, his eyes bent on the ground, as if he were invoking hell, while from his lips issued imprecations so terrible and repulsive against Soledad, Antonio, Manuel, the captain, and the priest that, of all his disciples, one only continued faithful, and remained with him. All the others had left him to follow the ideologist, Paco Antunez, declaring that they did not wish to be made the sport of vile passions; that they were unbelievers, but not criminals, and that they plainly perceived that the hard-hearted pharmacist, rather than an opponent of belief in God was an enemy of the human race, and in particular of those individuals who came between him and La Dolorosa, for whom he still felt all the tortures of hopeless love.

The one disciple who remained faithful to Vitriol we already know, morally, from an attempted exploit which the captain frustrated on the previous afternoon, by seizing him by the throat in the Calle de Santa Luparia. The baptismal name of this zealous volunteer of evil was Filemon, a name which history has preserved, owing to the odious resonance which it at last acquired to-day; and if it has not preserved his family name also, like that of Jean Baptiste Drouet, it is for the simple reason that our loathsome personage was a foundling.

"Calm yourself, Vitriol," Filemon said to his mas-

ter. "I will never abandon you, like those traitors who have followed Paco Antunez. I too have a great deal of bitterness in my soul to spit at the world, and I will be faithful to you till death!"

"What does it matter to me?" screamed the miserable wretch, weeping—not tears, but real vitriol. "Do you suppose that I am crying because those fools have abandoned me? Of what use can anyone be to me now? Of what use is life to me? My tears are tears of rage at the imbecility and cowardice of mankind!"

Here a knock was heard on the counter.

Filemon looked out and said to Vitriol:

"Go and attend to your customers."

"I will not go!" responded the pharmacist.

"But see, it is La Volanta!"

"Ah! La Volanta! Let her come in! Let her come in! She is the only resource left me!"

The hag entered, gasping for breath and bathed in perspiration, and sank into a chair. Her green eyes glittered with so wicked an expression that Vitriol fancied he saw a ray of hope. He gave her, then, instead of brandy, some spirits of wine mixed with water and syrup, and said to her, with the tone and manner of a boatswain giving his orders:

"Be quick! Out with it! You have something to tell me!"

La Volanta glanced at Filemon.

"Make yourself easy," said Vitriol. "He is one of the faithful, and he can help us, if there is anything to be done. So, then, speak!"

"Let me get my breath!" gasped the old woman at last. "I am half dead from running after that demon—and the worst of it is that I couldn't succeed after all in making him hear my cries."

"Who are you talking of?"

"Who should I be talking of? The Child of the Ball."

"How? You wanted to talk to him? Had you any message for him, then? From whom?"

"So you noticed nothing, then? So you didn't see me when I went up to him, and the priest came between us? I am glad of it! In that way it will be more of a surprise to you, and you will pay me better for my secret!"

"What secret? Tell it to me quickly, vile sorceress, or I will squeeze it out of you!"

"That's the kind of people I like—people with feelings! Give me a little more of that drink; it's so good! Well, then, you will remember that I went from here at about four o'clock this morning, after telling you all that had occurred in Manuel's house, to go and repeat it to Soledad, who was waiting for me to relieve her doubts as to whether her old lover was going to leave the town to-day or not. It was my intention also to inform Antonio Arregui, by your advice, that his mother-in-law and his child were spending the night in the house of Manuel Venegas."

"Well, go on—don't torture me!"

"Easy, easy, I am not a sack! I arrived, then, at the house of La Dolores, who had made arrange-

ments to have the door open for me, unknown to her husband (once inside, it didn't matter, for as I often sleep there, my presence in the house could surprise no one). The good Antonio had not undressed, and was downstairs in his office, walking up and down the floor, a very basilisk, on account of having received, in the earlier part of the night, some very sharp answers from his wife—who, as you know, rules him completely—to his questions as to whether she had cried or not at the procession. That is to say, that through this quarrel the rogue obtained what she wished, which was to exile the poor husband from her room, so that she might wait there for me alone—and ready for anything. With this same object, she had induced her mother to take the child home with her, saying that that was the best way to wean it——”

“Come to the end, in the name of five thousand devils!”

“I'm coming to it, man! I'm coming to it! Well, then, I found Doña Dulcinea in bed, in the midst of laces and ribbons, for she is proud and vain, even when she is asleep, and with her two eyes wide open like an owl's, waiting for the news that I was to bring her from her adored torment. I always told you that La Dolorosa was not born to be an honest woman! She is the daughter of Caiphas, and that is enough! The poor food she gives me, in exchange for the estates her father robbed me of, I have to swallow, mixed with a thousand jeers and insults about my liking for a drop of liquor, and

since her mother has ceased to live with her, most Sundays she stays away from mass."

"You do the same thing, and you are both right!"

"Listen, then, for now comes the best part of the story. 'Ah, Lucía! how long you have delayed!' she said when she saw me. 'Is poor Manuel going away? Will he allow us to live in peace? Has the priest persuaded him?' 'He has at last succeeded in persuading him,' I answered, 'and I think he is going away this morning.' 'This morning!' she cried, like a crazy woman. 'That cannot be! You don't know what you are saying!' I then related to her all that I had witnessed in the house of the gallant, and, as I went on talking, at times she would become very sorrowful, and at times very angry, until finally she flung herself out of bed, as radiant as the sun (for as a woman and a beauty no one can surpass her!) and said to me, embracing me as tightly as if I had been *he*: 'Lucía, can I count upon you? Can I trust you? Can I put my life and my honor in your hands?' You may imagine the answer I made her. I had her then in my power forever! So that I omitted no means of setting her mind at rest as to my loyalty. She then put on a white dress and her slippers, and began to write with the greatest haste."

"Give me that letter!" burst out Vitriol. "You need tell me no more! I can guess the rest! The letter is for Manuel Venegas, and you were unable to give it to him, fast as you ran! You have done

well in bringing it to me. Give it to me this instant!"

"What do you mean by 'Give it to me'?" replied the hag. "We must settle accounts first."

"Give me the letter!" roared Vitriol, beside himself.

"Indeed, then, I won't give it to you. If I couldn't succeed in delivering it to Manuel, it was because Soledad began and tore up so many others before writing this one, that, when I went out into the street, after speaking to Antonio, it was already half-past five, and the priest wouldn't allow me to get near his ward, afterward. But, give it to you! What nonsense! Don't you see that I have a fortune in this letter? Fancy how much Soledad would give to get it back again! Now, as I don't know how to read, I want you to inform me of its contents, so that I may calculate how far it compromises Doña Zapaquilda."

"Shall we take it from her by force?" said the foundling to the apothecary.

The old woman darted up like a viper, and drawing out a knife, said:

"If anyone comes near me, I'll rip him open! What a friend you have chosen, Vitriol! Don't you know that he gambles with marked cards? Don't you know that he lives by robberies like the one he has just advised you to commit?"

Vitriol replied dryly:

"I'll buy the letter from you. I have something saved up from my salary. How much do you want for it?"

"That is another matter—I won't give it to you for less than three dollars!"

"There they are!" replied the apothecary. "Give me the letter."

"Take it and give me the dollars!" cried the old woman, laughing and putting up her knife.

Vitriol opened the letter, whose envelope bore no address, and the first thing his eyes fell upon was a miniature of a handsome gentleman of from thirty to thirty-five.

"Who is that man?" he asked La Volanta. "He resembles Manuel Venegas."

"Why! It's his father, I declare!"

"And who gave it to Soledad?"

"What a question! the authorities! Don't you know that all the lands, furniture, and effects of Don Rodrigo passed into the possession of Don Elias?"

"True. Let us read the letter."

Vitriol devoured with his eyes La Dolorosa's letter, and a Satanic joy, mingled at times with pain, depicted itself on his lugubrious countenance, as he read. At last he ended; and, giving a howl of ferocious satisfaction, he exclaimed, resuming his walk up and down the floor:

"Not the very devil, not even I myself, nobody could have invented a weapon more terrible and efficacious! That which neither the public, nor jealousy, nor so-called honor, nor anger, nor his pledged word, could obtain from Manuel Venegas, this paper will obtain, love will obtain. Ah, how the wretch loves him! And how she precipitates

him into the abyss. I will complete the work of that imbecile, who takes the son of Don Rodrigo for a vulgar adulterer! Go this very instant to the livery stable-keeper, Lucía, and tell him to saddle a horse for Filemon, who will go there to mount it immediately."

"That's all very well," observed the hag, "but what am I to say to Soledad about her letter?"

"You are right; her hopes must be kept up, so that she may not fail to go to the raffle. Well, then, tell her that, as it was impossible for you to get near Manuel, you have sent it to him by a messenger, who swore to you that he would ride after him and give it to him on the road. Run, then. Make no delay! Tell the stable man to select a good strong horse. Filemon will follow you."

La Volanta hurried away.

"Listen, my friend," continued Vitriol, speaking in a solemn tone; "listen to this letter, and you will see how important is the rôle which you are to play to-day. You are to-day going to eclipse the glory of that celebrated Drouet, whom I have always envied, who spontaneously carried to Varennes the news of the flight of Louis XVI. Listen, and you will see that we can win, this afternoon, the battle we lost this morning. A short time ago I was like Napoleon at three o'clock in the afternoon at Marengo—ruined, defeated, flying; when up comes General Desaix, with his divisions, to my assistance, telling me that it is still possible to revoke the decree of fate; that I have still time to win the bat-

tle. That is what this letter of La Dolorosa is for me. Let the town, then, tremble! Let the universe tremble! Victory is to be on Vitriol's side!"

"But read the letter for me," said Filemon. "I wish to estimate the importance of my work."

"True! Let us read her letter again," responded the master ferociously. "There are poisons which serve as medicines, and such is this letter for me. Listen, and shudder at the abyss that may be concealed under the countenance of a Dolorosa!"

The letter was as follow:

"MANUEL:

"I neither can nor ought to remain silent any longer. I do not wish that you should go away cursing my name, nor that you should think of me with hatred for the rest of your life, when God knows that I deserve neither your hatred nor your malediction, but, on the contrary, that you should pity me as deeply as I pity you.

"Last evening, at the hermitage, and later in the night, in your own house, my mother no doubt earnestly besought you to go away forever, and to forget me; and she may even have used my name in begging you to do so. It would have been my greatest pleasure that she should not have counseled you to take this journey, but how say to my mother what I am going to say to you now?

"Therefore I have resolved to write you this letter, which you must not doubt to be written by my own hand, for I inclose in it, as you see, as a token, an object well known to you, and which only I could possess, that is, a likeness of your father, which we found in one of the pieces of furniture that had belonged to him, and which I had intended, in any

case, to return to you, together with all that was yours, including the estates. This my conscience and my wishes decided upon when, in my early years, I became acquainted with certain money transactions.

"Manuel, do not be surprised at anything I have said or that I may yet say to you. And then, why continue to hide it from you? Why lie or be silent, when my eyes have always betrayed me, when my tears betrayed me to-day? My heart is yours, Manuel! My heart has been yours ever since, when I was eight years of age, they put me to sleep in the sumptuous cot in which you had for so long slept, and of which you had just been despoiled. Many a night did I lie awake, thinking that you, an orphan, and poor, lying in a strange bed, sheltered by charity, might at that very moment be heaping upon me maledictions and contempt. Yes, my Manuel! Since that time my heart has been yours; that is to say, it has been yours since before I ever saw you, since I knew that you existed, and they related to me your misfortunes. Afterward I saw you, and I have nothing to tell you now that the girl's eyes first, and the woman's afterward, have not revealed to you.

"Is it my fault that you staid away for eight years? Do you know what I suffered during those years? Do you know that I was shut up in a convent, that I already wore the habit of a novice when I consented to marry I knew not whom, anyone, the first man who solicited my hand, that I might not be separated from you, on your return, by the walls of a cloister, which would not have permitted us even to look at each other, as we looked at each other before your departure?

"But although an evil fate has obliged me to marry another, do you not know me, Manuel?

Have you ceased to read my heart as clearly as when you used to say to everybody: 'I know that she loves me; I know that she is mine?' And if you know me, why do you go way? Why do you go away scorning me, hating me, not deigning to fight against the new misfortune which separates us in appearance, and leaving me to live and die with this man whom I do not know, who does not know me, and whom I do not love and never can love? Why do you punish me so severely, giving me up to the derision of a town that had always crowned me with the diadem of your love?

"Ingrate! cruel one! To repay me with so much indifference, and so much injustice, when I have waited for you seventeen years! To go away, first for eight years, and now forever, not understanding that from the first day of my youth, seeing myself so widely separated from you by fate, I sacrificed to you my modesty, my honor, and my life! Madman! Never to seek me *in secret*! To seek me always in the presence of the public! To imagine that it was necessary to go to America to make a million in order to approach me, to win my affection! To think now that it is necessary to kill anyone, to make the world tremble, to vanquish any obstacle in order to triumph at last over our hard fate, and to convert into a sweet reality all the dreams of our lives! To oblige me to tell you, mad with love, and my face dyed with the blushes of shame, what it was your place to think, to say and to do, knowing, as you have known ever since the first day you saw me, that you are the lord of my heart and of my whole being! the only man whom I have ever loved or whom I can ever love! the only one who can bestow upon me life or death!

"You see, my Manuel, you see! Your poor Soledad has lost her reason! Your Soledad, rendered

desperate by the knowledge that you are abandoning her forever, writes to you, raving, dying with love, without pride, without reserve, like the wife to the husband of her choice! Ah! do not go away! Come to me! forgive me! pity me! give me back your heart, although you should afterward end our lives!

“SOLEDAD.”

“Tremendous letter!” exclaimed the foundling.

“Terrible!” responded Vitriol. “A master production of two formidable passions, pride and lust! The wretch married Antonio Arregui so that it might not be said that I was the only man who had dared to defy the wrath of the Child of the Ball for the sake of possessing her, and to-day she puts a dagger into Manuel’s hand, that it may not be said that he goes away scorning her, and without doing her the honor of assassinating Antonio! Thus far pride. As for the rest, you must read Mirabeau’s letters to Sophie to find equal lust. And to think that I still adore her!”

“If you were to send the document to Antonio Arregui,” responded Filemon, “he would kill his wife, and your mind would be at rest.”

“I have thought of that. But it wouldn’t suit me!” returned Vitriol with horrible coolness. “What I want is that Antonio should be killed by Manuel, and that Manuel should be garroted by the executioner. In that way the execrable widow, alone and dishonored, would be as unhappy as I am. Besides, as the religious triumph of the priest con-

sists in the peaceable departure of Don Rodrigo's son, it is absolutely necessary that Don Rodrigo's son should return—and commit murder!"

"You are right! Give me the letter! The horse must be ready by this time."

"Take it, take it, my son!" exclaimed Vitriol with sinister joy. "The honor of philosophy and my longed-for vengeance are in your hands. I think you will be able to overtake our hero at one of the nearest inns. The madman has now been three days without eating or sleeping, and his strength must have a limit, like everyone's. Besides, the saddle-bags (crammed with gold, according to what La Volanta has told me) will prevent his horse from going very fast." When you come up with him, tell him that you are employed in Antonio Arregui's factory, and that his wife has confided this letter to you with the utmost secrecy. Then you will tell him, as if from yourself, that Arregui went to Santa Luparia yesterday to challenge him, and that that was why the procession hurried on so fast, and they shut him up in the sacristy; you will tell him, too, that Antonio was coming this morning again to attack him, and that it was only at Don Trinidad's entreaties that he desisted from his purpose; tell him, finally, that Soledad and her husband are going this afternoon to the raffle, and that the haughty manufacturer boasted to-day in the streets and squares of having put the dreaded Child of the Ball to flight. Ah! I was forgetting the chief thing. Try to make him believe that Don Trinidad has

been saying to-day, that the Child Jesus spoke to the Indian last night, commanding him to leave the town and to give all his jewels to the priest, authorizing him to dispose of them at his pleasure. In short—invent, maneuver, lie. Everything is lawful, when the safety of society is in question!"

"Make yourself easy, master, make yourself easy! I know what I have to say," responded Filemon, giving Vitriol his hand. "Good-by till the afternoon—that is to say, if I succeed in overtaking Manuel Venegas to-day. If I do not overtake him to-day I will follow him, if need be, to the end of the world!"

"You are a true man! When I die you will inherit my leadership!" cried Vitriol, accompanying his disciple to the door of the shop, and embracing him paternally.

And, when he had disappeared from view, the pharmacist said in a lugubrious voice:

"Soledad! you will not have it to say that I have forgotten you. You gave my letter to a dog to eat. I have given yours to a ferocious tiger! We are quits, soul of my soul!"

CHAPTER II.

THE RAFFLE.

THE same sun whose matutinal rays had lighted the solemn and moving spectacle of the departure of Manuel Venegas was pursuing, at half-past three in the afternoon, its majestic course, carrying in its train the posthumous and superfluous hours of a day now apparently useless, and whose interest, historic and personal, all the inhabitants of the town at this early hour regarded as at an end.

The majority of these, however, in obedience to the law of immemorial custom, had repaired after dinner to that amphitheater of yellow hills with inhabited caves, where, as on the same day of every other year, the dance of the raffle of the Child of the Ball was to be celebrated, and where, eight years before, had taken place the fatal auction in which Don Rodrigo's son was vanquished by Don Elias Perez.

Not only this wealthy individual, but many others, also, of those whom we saw there on that occasion, had died during the years intervening between 1832 and 1840. On the other hand, innumerable children of that time had grown up to be full-grown men and women; many bachelors and spinsters had married and had had children, and not a few fathers and mothers, who were then fresh and handsome, figured

now among the aged, and were grandfathers and grandmothers. But the scene, at first view and taken as a whole, was the same, however different it might be in individual details.

There were there, in fact, as on the former occasion, priests and members of religious orders, soldiers and dancers, gentry and plebeians; there were to be seen outside the doors of the dark caves rows of chairs occupied by richly dressed ladies and gentlemen in gala attire, there gleamed in the sunlight the vivid colors of the handkerchiefs and petticoats of the servant maids and the peasant women, the gaudy waistcoats and crimson sashes of the countrymen, the white strapped stockings of those who wore knee breeches, the red petticoats of the barefooted country girls, who wore no gowns, and the copper-colored skins of the urchins, who wore little or no clothing.

There also was to be seen, on a table covered with an altar cloth, the refulgent figure of the Child Jesus, adorned with all the jewels presented to him a few hours before by Manuel Venegas, whose Indian dagger, with its hilt of gold and precious stones, still lay at the feet of the beautiful image, as the dragon of sin is represented lying at the feet of the Virgin.

The multitude contemplated, full of wonder and curiosity, and very grateful to Heaven, these costly offerings of the fiercest rage transformed suddenly into Christian meekness. No doubt the thought of this marvelous change filled, in the imaginations of

these Moors, avid of extraordinary emotions, the void left by the pacification effected by the Christian charity of Don Trinidad Muley. The tragedy had miscarried; but there remained to them a Christian poem!

Nevertheless, although it would have been difficult to explain the cause, they were dispirited and melancholy. Perhaps their case was the reverse of Manuel Venegas's and that, as he had *charity* without *faith*, they had *faith* without *charity*. Or perhaps their dejection was due solely to the fact that the canons, whom they were waiting for to begin the festival, had not yet arrived; or because our friend, the veteran captain, who used to be the chief promotor of the dance and the raffles, was also absent; or because the bad news had spread that Don Trinidad Muley was ill in bed, with a violent fever, and that he had sent for a notary to make his will, as cessionary of the greater part of the wealth of his former ward.

The arrival of Don Trajano and the Madridlenian, followed by Doña Tecla, Pepito, and other members of the jurisconsult's circle, cheered, in some degree, the spirits of the rest of the assemblage who, as usual, passed in review the dress, the coiffure, and the adornments of the elegant cousin of the marquis, every detail of which they tried to fix upon their minds.

And very handsome and elegant she looked, in truth, on this day, with her gown of sky-blue *gros* and her black lace mantilla, that served rather to set

off than to conceal the statuesque outlines of her form; but it was all in vain for the beauties of the place to endeavor to copy what, in this woman of rank, educated by the sylphs of fashion, was now a second nature.

Nor would it be proper for us, in this hurried epilogue, to stop to relate all that was said on this occasion, by the Madridlenian, Don Trajano, and Pepito, with regard to the disappointment given to public expectation by Manuel. We will only say that the goddess several times declared that the denouement had been *very old* and that if, as a Christian, she inwardly congratulated herself on the happy termination of the affair, as an artist she could not but say that in her opinion the whole thing was prosaic and commonplace, and altogether unworthy of a hero called the Child of the Ball.

"In short," she ended, "the drama has not proved to be a romantic one!"

"You are more right than you imagine," answered Señor de Mirabel. "To make it a romantic drama a few crimes would be necessary. In compensation its denouement—as you yourself have said—has been eminently Christian."

"And what has art to do with Christianity?" replied the learned Madridlenian.

"Romantic art, nothing!" returned the Jovellanist. "That is precisely the offspring of pride and impiety, and the only worship it tolerates is that of woman and revenge. The romanticists are self-idolaters, worshipers of their passions, of their affec-

tions, of their sallow adored ones, and of other earthly pettinesses *ejusdem furfuris* ! ”

“Don Trajano must be in the right,” observed the hypocritical Pepito; “for they say in the town that those who are most displeased at the amicable denouement of the drama are the infidels of the pharmacy.”

“Terrible people!” responded the jurisconsult, arching his eyebrows. “The national militia don’t frighten me! You saw yesterday how enthusiastic and devout they were as they walked in the procession. Those progressionists are good at bottom! But this new rabble, who do not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ, present a great danger to the future of the country.”

“Listen to me a moment, Trajano—with the permission of the ladies and gentlemen”—interrupted the other old man, also a moderate Jovellanist, whom we saw yesterday sitting beside him on a balcony.

And putting his mouth close to the ears of the disciple of Moratin he added:

“That *rabble*, as you call them, is our legitimate successor! We, with all our parchments and blue blood, were, in our youth, partizans of Reason, of Common Sense, and even of that Supreme Being who has taken the place of the ancient Jehovah. Don’t you remember?” he ended with a laugh.

“You shouldn’t say those things,” muttered Don Trajano, with evident annoyance.

“I say them to you.”

"Not even to me! Not even to yourself! And you will see how in time you will come to *believe that you have other ideas.*"

The discussion was taking a dangerous turn, when providence willed that Antonio Arregui and La Dolorosa should arrive at the raffle, putting an end by their presence to this and to all the other conversations that were going on, very much less interesting than the persons who served as their subject.

Antonio looked very pale and agitated, but he was more attentive than ever to his wife, as if he wished to make a public display of his happiness, or sought a real reconciliation.

Soledad did not seem the mysterious sphynx she was at other times. On the contrary, she seemed restless; she looked about her continually, and her eyes were not now silent depths full of shadows, but volcanoes of love in action. It seemed as if premeditated adultery lay in wait in them for honor, to stab it on the back.

She was dressed in white, like a bride, and neither in regard to grace nor elegance had she any reason to envy the Madridlenian. A toque of black lace softly relieved the whiteness of her bare throat, while the strings of pearls which she wore as bracelets looked gray in contrast with her snowy arms. She was ravishingly beautiful; never did temptation present itself in more dangerous guise.

Not beside her adored daughter had Señá María Josefa—greatly altered by these two days of mortal terror—seated herself, but beside Antonio Arregui;

but she was still watchful and on guard, as if gloomy presentiments filled her with alarm. Honor and pattern of a sex so disadvantageously represented in this brief narrative, this noble woman, who had rejected, when a girl, the amorous attentions of her millionaire master, unless with the fitting accompaniment of his hand and name; whom we saw afterward as a faithful wife, patient and industrious; the tender mother, the friend of the poor, could not fail to receive, as she did that afternoon, respectful and compassionate glances from many other good women—meet reward of a long life of heroism, funereal eulogy, not greatly anticipated, in truth, of her who was to die not many days later.

The canons at last arrived, excusing their delay by saying that they had been obliged to assist at the vesper service, celebrated in commemoration of I know not what defunct monarch, who had conquered the Mahometans, and the raffle began, followed by the dance, this latter to the sound of Moorish instruments, that is to say, of guitars, cymbals, carrañacas, and castanets—as before the Conquest.

So far the partners for the dance had been determined not by means of bids, but by spontaneous choice, and the couples were consequently formed of girls and young men of the people, as inclination prompted, so that there was nothing to admire but the finery of some petticoated girl, rosy-cheeked and plump, who whirled around like a top, or the grace-

ful and continual *changes* to which some village dandy, in white shoes, *obliged* her.

The raffle had even less interest for the gentry, for nothing was put up to auction but strings of withered grapes, cakes of oil-bread, bunches of shriveled pears, apples—all exposed to view, which the devout had presented to the Child Jesus.

In this way five o'clock arrived and some of the well-to-do families, among others that of Antonio Arregui, were preparing to return to the town, when suddenly there was observed, before the more distant and higher caves, a great commotion, accompanied by exclamations of women and children:

"Manuel Venegas! Manuel Venegas! There he comes! He is crossing the vineyards now! He will be here directly!"

If a thunderbolt had fallen among the crowd it could not have caused greater consternation. The whole assemblage rose to their feet; the music and the dancing ceased; some ran to meet the dreaded young man, following the indications of those who could see him, for he was coming by an unusual route; others fled in an opposite direction, as if to escape the storm brewing in the air—and there were some who even spoke of going for Don Trinidad Muley.

Antonio Arregui was the only one who remained seated, or, rather, who reseated himself, on hearing the dread announcement. He was livid, but resolute, silent, and as if indifferent to what was passing.

"Let us go away! Let us go home!" said Señá

María Josefa to him with tears. "Remember that you have a child!"

Other women, and even some men, offered to hide him in this or that cave.

The authorities endeavored to tranquilize him, telling him that *they were there*.

Antonio answered none of them.

Soledad remained standing, silent, terrible, seeming to await her husband's decision.

"Sit down!" said the latter to her harshly and without looking at her.

Soledad obeyed with apparent indifference.

And the authorities and the other mediators coldly withdrew from him, seeing that he made them no answer, the Alcalde going to consult about the case with the chief of his party, that is to say, Don Trajano, to whom he owed the wand.

The jurisconsult declared that Manuel Venegas could not be arrested so long as he neither committed nor attempted to commit any crime; but that he, as well as Antonio Arregui, must be closely watched.

The Madridlenian, who, although somewhat alarmed, was in her glory, was of the same opinion.

Then the Alcalde requested everybody to be seated, and gave orders that the music and the dancing should go on, which were obeyed, although without any inclination on the part of either the actors or the public.

Meanwhile Manuel Venegas was seen coming, not from the direction of the town, but over the hill, as

if he had taken a cross-cut down the neighboring mountain in order to arrive the sooner on the scene.

He was on horseback and he had now few obstacles to surmount to reach the open road, which would quickly bring him into the midst of the raffle.

The perplexity of the chorus was immense, indescribable. It had changed its rôles so many times in the course of this drama, that it no longer knew what attitude to assume, or even comprehended, perhaps, what its own feelings were.

At this juncture Manuel arrived at the esplanade which served as the theater of the festival. He dismounted from his horse, whose bridle he delivered to the first officious person who presented himself, and, without looking at or saluting anyone, he advanced toward the spot where the dancing was going on.

Antonio turned slightly in his chair, so as to sit with his back to the haughty young man, as if leaving his life to the care of the public conscience and the representatives of the law.

Manuel, altered by forty-eight hours of ceaseless suffering, feverish, delirious, transported by Sole-dad's letter, gazed at the latter with his usual terrible audacity, and also with a species of loving pride and open triumph, which proclaimed, in a manner ferocious from its ingenuousness, Antonio Arregui's dishonor, filling the assemblage with wonder. Assuredly if the husband had seen that look his dignity would have made him precipitate himself upon the bold man who thus offended him. But, we repeat,

Antonio took no notice whatever of Venegas, or, at least, he did not look at him.

Soledad, on her part, kept her gaze fixed upon the ground.

The mother was the only one who saw all this and who trembled like a leaf.

The spectators, too, trembled; and more than one murmured in a low voice:

"This is horrible! One can feel the taste of blood!"

Others added:

"Have you remarked that Manuel carries a pair of pistols in his belt?"

And, in fact, everyone noticed, defined through the rich silk of his sash, in the front of his belt, the outlines of two long objects, which gave room for such a supposition.

In short, the case was as grave and perilous as any lover of affrays and disasters could desire. If Vitiol had been there he would have been swimming in rose water.

A worthy man, the bun seller of the Plaza, then conceived the happy idea of turning in another direction the attention of Manuel and of the spectators, with the purpose of exorcising the conflict.

"A real," he exclaimed, "for Manuel to dance with the marchioness!"

And he pointed to Don Trajano's guest.

The idea was applauded loudly, and awakened in the people a deliberate joy, that was rather merci-

fulness than joy. The cause of Good had just gained a great deal of ground.

No one made any bid against the benevolent old man, and as the commonest courtesy forbade Manuel to refuse to dance with so noble a lady, and as on the other hand it suited his purpose that the traditional law of the raffle should be respected blindly by everyone on this day, he yielded to the gentle pressure with which several persons sought to animate him, and advanced toward the stranger.

The latter did not wait to be urged, and was already standing when Manuel approached her, hat in hand. The beauty gave our hero an amiable smile by way of acceptance and greeting, slung her mantilla under her arm, as if she had been born in Albaicín itself, and, taking her place among the other couples, all of whom immediately stopped, in order that the elegant Madridlenian and the famous Manuel might be the better able to display their grace, she began to dance a classic fandango, sober in changes, but voluptuous as the most so, which drew from the spectators a thousand acclamations.

Manuel scarcely moved. It might be said that he merely swayed backward and forward, in response to the alternate advances and retreats of the beautiful aristocrat, whose silken gown rustled with each graceful contortion of her arms and her form, like the shining scales of a lithe snake erecting itself and coiling itself alternately, to charm the desired victim.

But the unfortunate young man, for whom black

fate had reserved this last mockery, did not raise his eyes from the ground.

Soledad availed herself meantime of the general distraction to devour her lover with her eyes. Antonio remained with his back turned almost completely to his wife and to the public. And, as if it were still possible for comedy to replace tragedy, Don Trajano and Pepito were furiously jealous to think that they were not fitted for the eminently personal art of Terpsichore.

The so-called marchioness stopped dancing and stood, with her arms half extended, awaiting the customary and indispensable embrace.

Manuel stood still, embarrassed, and she remained motionless, affecting coyness.

"Embrace her!" cried the public.

Manuel advanced timidly and embraced the beautiful stranger, amidst the applauses of the multitude.

Luisita then extended her hand to the young man that he might conduct her to her seat, and, detaining him, when they had taken a few steps, she said:

"So you are not going away, then? Come to see me and we will have a talk about America. I have interests in Lima."

"Señora," answered Manuel gloomily, "what you have, or rather have had, is the cruelty to dance with a corpse!"

The Madridlenian felt a thrill of horror run through her, and releasing her hand from that of the unhappy man, she saluted him ceremoniously and hurried to her seat.

"He is a most polished man! a delightful man!" she said, to right and left, as she went, to disguise her fear and humiliation.

At this moment a terrible voice, like the sound of the last trump of the Judgment Day—the voice of Manuel Venegas, was heard saying:

"A hundred thousand reals to dance with that lady!"

And he pointed to Soledad.

The whole assemblage rose to their feet, Antonio first of all. The common people burst into huzzas and shouts of applause.

An indescribable agitation prevailed.

Manuel Venegas stood in the middle of the esplanade, alone, his arms folded, his eyes fixed on La Dolorosa.

The latter and her mother held back Antonio, while the authorities, the prebendaries, Señor de Mirabel, and many other persons of distinction, said to him that Venegas had the right to do as he had done; that the petition was legitimate; that it could only be rejected by outbidding him, but that it would be rashness to do this, since that man possessed millions and was half mad.

All the turbulent spirits and the mob of boys and mendicants shouted meanwhile:

"He has made his bid! A hundred thousand reals! If the other doesn't offer more let him take the consequences! Come, Señora, come out and dance; it will soon be dark. The Child Jesus is before all! Señor Arregui, the only weapon

you can fight with here is money! Out with the cash, or let your wife dance! You must do one or the other!"

Antonio was obliged to desist from his purpose of going to Manuel and challenging him to mortal combat, this being the plan which was to be deduced from his half-uttered phrases, and, pressed by the steward of the Brotherhood, who called out in official tones: "A hundred thousand reals for the Señora de Arregui to dance with Don Manuel Venegas!" he exclaimed in angry accents:

"My whole fortune that he shall not dance!"

"That won't do! That offer is null! After what happened here eight years ago, it has been decided that bids can be made only with ready money. Don Elias did not pay the Brotherhood the two thousand dollars he offered, and the brothers had to bear the costs of the suit!"

This, in various forms, was what the cries of the multitude, and even the words of persons of importance, told Antonio.

Manuel remained waiting, impassive, at his post.

Soledad had already said to her husband:

"Let him have his way! I will dance with him! What does it matter? The cousin of the marquís danced with him!"

"You shall not dance with him!" responded Antonio harshly.

"You are right! She must not dance with him!" cried Señá María Josefa. "Let us go home."

"That cannot be!" responded the men of weight

and the authorities. "The customs of the town must be respected! A riot must be avoided! The Child Jesus cannot lose that money."

"I will go to my own house and to the houses of my friends and collect all the money I can, and bid up to the clouds," the worthy Riojan answered them.

"That is folly!" argued the others. "It will soon be dark! Besides, how can you go away from here without your wife? And how can you take her with you until she has danced? No one would consent to your doing so."

Things being in this situation, the Madridlenian, the dictatress of the town, the woman whom everybody feared and looked up to, left her place, and approaching Soledad, took her by the hand and said to her politely:

"Señora, I should like to have the honor of leading you to the dance. And you, Señor Arregui, consider that I myself have danced with the person in question. Come, Señora. I request it of you——"

Soledad rose.

Arregui did not know what to answer and hung his head in despair.

The public made way for them to pass, and the Madridlenian conducted Soledad to the spot where her audacious lover awaited her.

The latter had just taken from his belt what had appeared to be a pair of pistols, but what was now seen to be a pair of packages of gold ounces.

He counted three hundred and thirteen on the salver which one of the brothers presented to him, and said with the utmost naturalness:

"There is half an ounce over. Give it to some beggar."

He then turned to Soledad, saluted her, taking off his hat courteously, and, as at this moment the music began, the fatal dance also began, of those two beings who had never exchanged a single word and yet who, it might be said, had spent their lives together, animated by one soul, ruled by the same destiny.

Soledad did not dance, she moved from side to side, her eyes fixed on the ground, as if she were possessed by a vertigo; Manuel did not dance, either; he followed in Soledad's steps, looking at her greedily, as the man devoured by thirst looks at the water which he is about to raise to his lips.

Antonio trembled and hid his face in his hands, that he might not see the scoff that was being made of his love, perhaps of his honor.

The public maintained an awestruck silence, that seemed a foreshadowing of remorse.

Soledad at last stood still, as if she regarded the terrible dance as ended, and raised to Manuel's eyes, eyes fascinating, voluptuous and malign, in which was to be read the whole of the letter she had written at daybreak.

Manuel then advanced toward his beloved with outstretched arms, into which she threw herself, unable to restrain the passionate impulse of her

soul and of her blood. The hapless man caught her, pressed her madly to his breast, like the trophy of his whole life—and earth and Heaven disappeared from the view of the two insensate lovers.

"Help! He is strangling her!" the mother suddenly burst forth, rushing toward them.

"Assassin!" cried Arregui, raising his eyes, and seeing what was taking place.

"He has killed her!" exclaimed many other persons, amid cries of unspeakable horror.

For Soledad had been seen by everyone to turn blue, the blood had been seen to gush forth from her mouth and ears, and her head to droop on the breast of Manuel Venegas. For the nearest spectators had heard the cracking of fragile bones in the clasp of the arms of steel with which the mad athlete continued pressing La Dolorosa to his breast!

And the unhappy man, unaware, doubtless, that he had killed her, looked around him, meanwhile, as if challenging the universe to take her from him.

By this time the mother had reached them and was struggling vainly to release her daughter from that lion's embrace.

Antonio, on his side, rushed to seize the dagger that lay at the feet of the Child Jesus, and ran toward Manuel, uttering cries of vengeance.

Manuel saw him approaching; he knew that the steel was descending; he felt the blow; but he made no movement to defend himself, for to do so he must have loosened his adored one from his embrace.

Only when the dagger had transpierced his heart did he open his arms, from which fell heavily to the ground the corpse of La Dolorosa.

The two lovers, then, fell together, and the blood of both, intermingling and confounded, was drunk up by the thirsty earth.

The unconscious mother and the dead formed a group together.

Antonio replaced the dagger at the feet of the Child Jesus, and delivered himself up voluntarily to justice.

THE END.